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on painting, schizophrenia, and The Replacements

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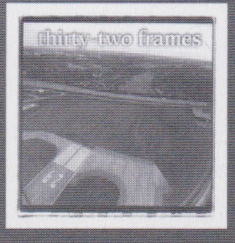
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This Issue is Dedicated to Erin Colleen McBride
Music Lover March 1977 – July 2002

LEFT OF THE DIAL
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEWS

4 Bad Religion
13 Channel 3
17 Dag Nasty
21 Darkest Hour
28 The Dictators
37 The Dils
47 New Bomb Turks
50 El Vez
54 Her Space Holiday
64 The Hives
69 The Invisible Men
71 Joe Lally
76 MIA
80 Milemarker
89 Chris Mars
93 Trial by Fire
96 Peter Murphy
100 Walter Salas-Humara
106 Slaughter and the Dogs

FEATURES

57 Flashback: SNFU & Soulside
73 Knievel: Tour Diary
111 Black Cat Music: Tour Diary

THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

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CORRECTIONS/NOTES

Last issue said that the pub rock bands Dr. Feelgood and Eddie and the Hot Rods were from the south end of London. Sorry Brits, they were actually from South End on the Sea.

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EDITOR'S INTRO.

I still want to believe that rock'n'roll will somehow make this world

less dishonest and lame-hearted, but I wasn't really surprised when Ryan Adams and Jimmy Eat World blared across the world on Saturday Night Live. For me, when the Clash pranced around in military gear on the same show twenty years ago, or Blondie swooned on the *Muppet Show*, or The Damned and Motorhead roared and rollicked on the *Young Ones*, it was all about TV coming to grips with the fact that music matters for some people, but for a small minority, it's a religion. They trespassed on our religion. The Clash were our revolutionary saints turned into Panama platoon cartoon clowns. Blondie became as hollow and eerie as a drugged Muppet. Motorhead looked like sweat bursting, out-of-shape, trailer park Harley riders who were hairy as my motley dog, and the Damned looked like last year's Hollywood Boulevard leftovers. Aerosmith and Mick Jagger may still shake their arthritic asses on late-night TV, or Master P and Snoop Dogg may get down and dirty on Mad TV, but 90 per cent of America does not care. It's all ear candy and locomotion, lip sync and falling asleep on the couch. When the White Stripes are featured in every hack "lifestyle" magazine on the planet, and The Strokes sell out 3,000 seat theatres even in the backwards South, have they become yesterday's news in less than six months? When TV sells them like candy bars, should I throw out my TV or pretend I'm watching the Who on Top of the Pops and go start up a band of my own the next day (hmm, I already have one).

I've always felt that the larger goal of punk rock was not to make more records and wear ripped-up clothes and sell somebody something. Even though you just bought this mag, I'm really not interested in your slim beaten wallets as much as I am interested in forging a community, even half-blindly, from this mess heap of punk and indie history that has kindly cobbled us together for the last twenty-five years. That doesn't mean I want another series of banal "me, me, and more me" columns like other mags; instead, I want solid, detailed interviews with your favorite band. It's "More Than Music," just like Verbal Assault once sang, and whether you saw them in an over-heated basement, opening up for some hardcore band in a shitty theatre, or watched them wrangle with their own fear and sense of injustice at a roller skating rink in Loves Park, IL (like I did), you felt that there was a smoldering connection between you and the music that was meant to propel you not into a new highly-guarded and self-conscious lifestyle, but into a larger world where things mattered. Politics. Identity. Rights. History. Deeds. Passion. Whether or not you bought the record, slipped on the tight black t-shirt, or wore the button was beside the point. You were now driven. You were now ignited. You were now reborn. You were now living purposefully, as if awoken from a life that was more like a coma than a body electric. What were you going to do? Who were you going to be? The next Tim Yohannon, Al Flipside, or Jack Rapid? The next Raymond Pettibon, Art Chantry, or Pushead? The next Lydia Lunch, Penelope Houston, or Phranc? Were you going to be a part of the problem or part of the solution? Were you going to be the revolutionary or the lackey?

There is no doubt that there are people laboring hard to make the vision of our punk foremothers/fathers come true to some degree. But what bums me out most about magazines like *Punk Planet* is the way they have abandoned music as their core. While I like and even trust their political coverage and tackling of social issues, which really just seems like *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* without the vehemence, I am disappointed that their sense of music has really almost dwindled to music reviews, the real bane of our punk rock existence. "Selling kids to other kids..." is how it went, right? Listen, if you want me to sell your music, take out an ad. I am not a reference source for budding young capitalists, and we all know that a bad review still sells records. I also mean punk in the largest sense. The taunt early directness of the Nerves and Suicide Commandos to emo-pop brushwork. Funky Big Boys to macabre Misfits. Stiff New York hardcore down beats to wiggly Make-Up hip shakes. If so-called alternative, indie, or punk mags want to sell us the lifestyle under the guise of record reviews, why don't we call it punk merchandising, punk JC Penney catalog, or punk gimme your money and run. If *Punk Planet* really wants to make a difference, maybe they should become the next *Z*, *Nation*, or *Anarchy: Journal of Armed Desire* for that matter. Maybe they should drop the moniker "punk" and say, we used to be interested in punk music but now we're college educated kids looking to write about something else. Undoubtedly, their last issue had more music than their last year combined, but when *The New York Times* (The Rapture, Les Savy Fav) and *New Yorker* (the White Stripes, the Hives) have better rock criticism and writing than our own media, I scratch my head in disbelief. We have fallen short. We have yet to become the media.

When I go to the record or magazine shop and see nothing but mags like *Magnet* on one hand, a real slick and god-awful indie wannabe bible, or other mags so specifically focused on one thing (rockabilly, pop, roots rock), I thank my lucky stars that *Suburban Voice* and *Big Takeover* still exist, and mourn the days of *Bucketful of Brains*, *Chemical Imbalance*, *Bob*, *Flipside*, *Ink Disease*, *Slash*, and about a thousand more. If you don't like or understand my coverage of roots rock, then go start an angry young Oi boy 'zine, or thrift store indie grrl post-hardcore 'zine. To me, Hank Williams Sr. was the Clash. We can no longer buy into the myth and prejudice of punk or the tunnel vision of indie rock. When students walk into my class with Dropkick Murphy shirts, but have never heard of *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*, or scrawl Jimmy Eat World, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Dashboard Confessional on the back of their notebooks, I want to snicker a bit, but then I remember my own childhood. The first time I flipped open a fanzine and a world popped out. Fanzines that were rough xeroxed maps that made the invisible visible. Go find the spot marked X, and your rock'n'roll dreams will become real. I still have my 7th grade notebooks. I still smile when I see the pen graffiti- the Black Flag lyrics in loopy or crooked letters. I don't want to squash that innocence anymore...

Maybe I am just a complainer, a retro guy who thought that when my Minor Threat record was going in circles on my parent's big green stereo unit I was suddenly taking part in what the IWW called creating a new world within the old world. Or when DOA, Gang of Four, and Allen Ginsberg were giving me the lowdown, it was not some secret society gibberish, not something that I would get over when I grew up, but that it was a vision akin to Walt Whitman. As Al Burian from Milemarker suggests, one of punk's greatest failures is that the indie world emulates capitalism instead of achieving a dependable and long-lasting way to do business on entirely different terms. I am guilty of this too. Yet, I have not forgotten the handwritten letters from BYO and Dischord that came along with my orders, or the way John Haggerty from Naked Raygun told me, "Thank you for being here," when I gushed at a Pegboy show and told him about seeing Naked Raygun three times, "Those were good days," he assured me. When I hung out with Darkest Hour and Slaughter and the Dogs, I knew that those days aren't gone, they've just reinvented themselves, and it's up to us to see the difference and know how to forge ahead. We are the keys. We are the storytellers. We are the codebreakers. It's time to get moving...



BAD RELIGION

The World According to Bass: An interview with Bad Religion's Bottom End (Jay Bentley)

Bad Religion are not so much grandfatherly captain cool honchos of hardcore punk as much as rock solid purveyors of all things fast and furious. You may hate or love Greg Graffin's brand of whiz kid intelligence and the frenetic down strokes of three guitarists, but they have unmatchable gusto and discipline that make Fugazi seem like part-timers. Their records may not all be legendary or even listenable sometimes, but when they hit the road they throw down a wide net of history and grab whole new generations of listeners. They may have a business side, but they're frank about it, compared to many bands that buy suburban hideaways while posing as beans and potatoes graffiti boys. So like 'em or leave them, this is the bass side of the story.

We've changed booking agents, and the guy who is now our booking agent is someone I really like and admire, which is rare in the music business. I don't like anybody really.

Why is that?
Just because I think they are all scum.

Isn't that the nature of the business?
The nature of the business is that people want to make money off musicians. So, 99.9% of those people have never picked up a guitar, have never been on a tour, they don't understand what happens to bands every day they are out there, and they keep grinding these guys into pulp for their 15% commission. They are scum *(laughs)*.

Bobby had to quit the band, and his career as a drummer, after he found out that he couldn't lift his arm above his head anymore?
Yeah, that's true.

The nature of the business is that people want to make money off musicians. So, 99% of those people have never picked up a guitar, have never been on a tour, they don't understand what happens to bands every day they are out there, they keep grinding these guys into pulp for their 15% commission.

Did that make you painfully aware that the last twenty years of being in a band has taken its physical toll on you guys?
Yeah, but the difference between Bobby and myself, or Brian Baker or anybody else who has an injury which in the middle of the Blink 182 tour, I fell off a skateboard and broke my arm. I could have gone home and said the tour's over, but I said fuck it, whatever, I broke my arm. I'll move the guitar up.

That must have been painful.
It was very fucking painful, but you know what, I had four other guys that rely on me, back to the scum part, guys that rely on me to provide these guys' living.

You felt that you just had to get the job done?
Right. You know, it's like what happens to me doesn't matter, because what about everybody else? So when I got home it wasn't like I bottled myself up into a room and drank beer, I went straight to a physical therapist and started having work done, because I don't want to be that guy.

But it was too late for him. Even with surgery, because of the nature of his injury, he only had a 50/50 chance of having successful surgery.
It was too late because of his, well, I won't say unwillingness, but his inability to seek professional help, and that just wasn't in his ball field. And what it finally came down to is, there are two sides to this coin, one side is surgery, and the other side is quitting. That's all there is, and there are no other choices.

And the surgery, from I understand, would not necessarily help.
Everybody we talked to said, maybe it would help for awhile, but it will probably come back if you continue to drum, do I don't really see the point in it.

You now have Brooks, who played with both Suicidal Tendencies and the Vandals. What has he added, if anything, that Bobby could not?
When Bobby first came into the band for *Generator*, he was like Brooks. He was wild. He could play shit that I couldn't believe. But I think over the course of a lot of years he kind of had the wildness beat out of him, and it just didn't want to be wild anymore. He just wanted to play drums and get the fuck out, and that's not his fault. I don't blame him for that at all, that's just the nature of this band. It's that generally speaking over the past bunch of years we haven't necessarily been the nicest people to each other. So eventually, people just get tired and they don't want to try anymore. Bob just kind of skated along like the rest of us for the last couple of albums, so when Brooks came into the band, it was very much like when Bobby came into the band in 1991.

Was part of the reason that no one seemed very happy was because Bad Religion was on a major label?
No, it had nothing to do with it. Labels don't mean shit. Labels are labels, no matter if it's Epitaph or Dischord or Atlantic or Sony. They are all the same. There's a guy who runs it, and a bunch of people below him. That's pretty much it. So being on Atlantic didn't really mean much to us because they basically left us alone. They didn't care what we did. They knew we were perfectly capable of producing our own stuff and going out on tours.

They even let you record one album in Greg Graffin's basement in Ithaca, New York.
Yeah, but they made us mix that record with Chris Lord-Alge. They made us hire a mixer, but I didn't care. I kind of fought it for a minute just because. I was like, fuck that, you are telling me what to do, then I thought, that's probably a really smart thing because Chris is a good mixer and he really did do a good job on that record, so I fought it just because I could, but then realized that I was being arrogant and stupid.

So that was a good decision?
It was a great decision. It saved the record.

But now having three guitars on board, do you feel a bit squeezed?
No, because there's one guitar player in the band, and that's Brian. Brian is the best guitar player in the band. Everybody in the band knows that. So Brian does the bulk of the work. Brett writes amazing songs and plays things on the guitar only he can play because he wrote it that way. Gregg has a really unique down stroking style and a style all his own, so everybody has their place. It's not like three guys all racing towards the finish line in some wild scramble for guitar prowess. It was very organized in terms of who was going to do what. There was never any question, it was like, this is the way it is going to be simply because letting Brian doing the bulk of the work cut the recording time in $^1/_3$, because he can just sit in a chair and play shit that most people can't. That's just him, and that's what he does.

The only three guitar band I can think of is Articles of Faith, the hardcore band from Chicago led by Vic Bondi during the 1980s.
I think that the concept of having three guitar players because you want is completely different than having three guitar players because you have to. Do you understand what I mean by that? Like having three guitar players by choice I think is stupid. It's overkill. If you get three guitar players because you can't kick anybody out- like Brett's coming back and playing guitar- well nobody's getting fired. You just add one more.

You just push the envelope more?
Sure, why not? Use it to your advantage. It's not awkward because there's no egos involved in the guitar playing. In fact, everybody just stands there and says, who's going to play what, and they laugh and have a great time.



Photo by Kevin Scanlon

So getting songs written is not like a wrestling match?

Not at all, which I didn't really understand, because everybody has been asking us that, like what's it like having three guitar players, and I never really understood it until I saw that people were imagining, yeah, baby oil wrestling under hot lights to see who was going to play the solo *(laughs)*. I've always said, no, no, no, that was never an issue. It never came up.

Gregg Graffin said that you tried to take this record back to the *No Control* period.

No, I think that's too old. Back to the *No Control* period is too far away. You know, when we made *No Control*, we were just barely out of being blind. Just kind of humming along doing stuff and not really understanding why. We made records because we could. There is a certain elegance to that, which really lends itself to those records, but that's not part of what we are doing now. I think we are very purpose minded. When we went in to make this record, I think we were driven by a very specific goal, and that was to get out of the rut we had put ourselves in with the past 18 months. Brett and I were having a conversation when we were still on Atlantic. Things had progressed with Brett and myself so that we were back on speaking terms after he wrote the songs for *New America*, so we were talking a lot and he said, do you remember what the Ramones' thirteenth record was? I said no, I don't. He said, nobody does. You know. It might have been *Adios Amigos*, but I'm still not sure. But nobody remembers it. He said, that's where you are going. You are about to make your thirteenth record that no one will remember, because it will be yet another Bad Religion record. Don't you really want to do something special, and I said yes. That in itself didn't really mean anything to me, because talking about it and doing it are two very separate things. And at the time, we were basically in a hole, and strange things happened, organically, that just allowed us to walk away from everything and put us right here right now.

Gregg has said, "We really try to deliver the songs the way are supposed to be when we play live, but sometimes it's a lot harder, because they are not easy songs to recreate." Do you agree?

There's only a handful of songs that are musically hard to recreate, like an example would be "All Good Soldiers," because it's bizarrely complex. The songs on this album are not too difficult to recreate. But in Gregg's words, that's very simple for me to explain, because he writes songs for himself to sing that are within a comfortable range of his voice. Brett writes songs for him to sing that are at the peak of his voice because Brett likes the way that sounds. But Gregg cannot sing those songs every night, night after night, because he'll go BLAH. In that sense, it's very true, because it's hard to recreate a lot of the vocal patterns we do, and that's on a lot of songs. Musically speaking, not so much, because I think that's something we've always tried to stay away from, like getting too production-oriented in the studio, because you can say, let's do 69 tracks of guitar. On "Against the Grain," honestly I think we did 28 tracks of guitar, but it doesn't sound like it. It's not muddy. It's really intricate singing coming and going, and all this stuff that you could never do live. We tried to do the song live, but it just didn't really...Well, it's not the same, we just cut it in a way that we could do it. It doesn't sound anything like the record.

It seems a little unfair to say that you would have made a thirteenth record that no one would remember because it was just 7 or 8 years ago that you made *Stranger Than Fiction*, and that's when you guys really gained a large fan base, whereas the Ramones' success story really ended with the 1970s for the most part.

Yeah, but it hadn't continued for us. *Stranger Than Fiction* was huge by our standards.

You were on 120 Minutes, the Conan O'Brien Show.

Yeah, but the *Gray Race* did half that, and *No Substance* did half that (*Gray Race*), and *New America* did half that (*No Substance*). You know, it was a pretty consistent decline.

But did it reflect the quality of the records or just the failure of marketing?

I think both. I think that by the time we made *New America*, there was just a lot of

questioning as to why. To be honest, I just went there because it was in Hawaii. Because Gregg was really excited about working with Todd, so I didn't give a shit about that. But I figured, I'll go sit on the beach for two months and just drag my ass around. I'll show up every once in awhile and play something that they want me to play and then I'll leave, and I won't contribute and I won't care.

A lot of the early hardcore guys like Dukowski from Black Flag said things like, if I ever have to do this for a living, it goes against everything I believe.
Totally. I've been saying that forever. The low point of my career was the tour after Blink 182.

Not the Blink 182 tour, but the one after, which you headlined?
The Blink 182 tour was fucking funnier than shit. It wasn't our responsibility, it was huge, and we just went out and fucked around. It was brilliant. What better thing can you do than just go out and scare the shit out of people…

But it drew criticism from your hardcore fan base.
You know what, fuck them. I don't mean that like, fuck my fans, but you see you say the hardcore fan base was complaining, and you know what, I wouldn't go. I didn't pay 30 dollars to see me play with Blink. I just get people who complain about everything we do, from what I eat for breakfast to who we tour with. I am over it, and I have been over it since 1989 when we couldn't play Gilman St. Warehouse because we were too big. So, how many things can you do when you keep bending over backwards to make everybody else happy? Fuck it. That's not me. I don't want the fucking flag. I'll just wrap it up and send it back to whoever keeps sending it. I don't want it. I am here for me and my friends, and we do what we like to do.

So why was the tour after Blink 182 such a low point?
Because now we're on our own. Going out with Blink 182 was no responsibility, completely wonderfully childish, the big rock shows, going to the big stadiums, all the catering, just the whole fucking thing. It was everything that we've never, ever had, so it was funny. It was funny to us and enjoyable. Not in the sense of wow, I want this, or this is what we should be having, but this is the dark side of the moon. And okay, that's enough, that's over, now let's go out on our own tour like we always do. That tour just opened everything up where I felt like, god, I don't know what I am doing any more. I do not know why I am here. I didn't. Three-fourths of the way through the tour I kept saying, I guess this is it. I always told myself that when I got to this point, I am going to walk away. Graffin felt the exact same way. The end of the tour was the end of Bobby's career. It was in South America, and Gregg and I looked at each other like that was it, like we're all going to go home and never talk about this again. It was over. We've always said that the one thing we didn't want to do was be a re-union band, which is why we tried to put out a record every year, or close to it. We tried to keep product out there because we keep writing songs and keep having fun doing it. That was, to me, the lowest point since *Into the Unknown* came out, because it was over. And that's how I felt. I got home and the first thing I did was fire everybody, management, booking agent, and accountants. I said you're all fired.

Did you feel liberated?
No. I fired them because I didn't want to pay them anymore. I didn't feel that after 22 years after being in Bad Religion that they knew half of what I knew about being in Bad Religion and I was paying them money to guide me. Fuck that. You don't know anything, you just suck the money. You're fired. I did like what I said. I made a few phone calls and hired some friends, people that I actually respected. I said, I don't know what we are going to do, I'm not sure really where we are going right now, but I want you there if we do anything. I want to rattle things up and change things, but I don't know what's going on. We might never play again, I don't know. The day came and went for Atlantic to pick up the options, and I was very happy, because I did not get a phone call. I thought, that's it. All I needed was one day. So I called everybody and said, we're off, we're off, we're off. Write the letter, send the letter, because that's all we needed, a letter saying we're done.

That's it?
That was it. They had a specific date as to whether or not they would pick up the option. We didn't have anywhere to go. There was no hurry.

So it was a clean break?
Yeah. It was somebody else I wanted to fire but couldn't really. You can't fire your label, but when the day comes and goes, then you can. All of that happened, and it was so funny, because Brett kept popping in and out, and Gregg and Brett were now talking about writing material. We had no idea of what label we were on. We still had a record due with Sony, for the rest of the world.

You hadn't been cutting demos or anything?
No, nothing. I remember talking with Brett and saying maybe we could do something with Epitaph for North America, because I don't know what our deal with Sony is. I think he was kind of into that and felt that it was a pretty cool thing to the point where he called me a few days later and played a demo over the phone. Listen to this, I wrote this, but it was all distorted over the phone. But I was just so happy that he was excited about writing that I was like, great, great. That was June of last year. From February, when Bobby left, until June, was like that really dark, not knowing what was going to happen, you don't really know for sure time.

But after June, it came together very quickly?
Really quickly. We said, we better find a drummer.

You tried out five drummers, but knew he was the guy after one song?
I knew when he sat down.

How?
You just know. You see people and the way they compose themselves. Just the way they are. Bobby was in the band before he played a song. Back when Bobby tried out, Bobby was setting up his drum kit, telling jokes, just talking shit. I go, I like this kid. He's funny. He got it. He understood that it wasn't a big deal. I guess it is, but he didn't see it as such, he just saw it as something to do on a Thursday, which really worked out, because he wasn't impressed, he wasn't afraid, he didn't care. He was like whatever, let's play some songs. And that's what we were looking for. I don't necessarily like playing with someone who just waits to be told what to do, because I'm like, then why are you here? If I am going to tell you what to do, I can get anybody. I need you to tell me what you are going to do and go, that's great. That's being part of the team, otherwise you're just a fucking anchor. Literally, it's true.

It seems that many bands think of drummers as being expendable.
I totally disagree. But that's fine, because they're expendable drummers. You can look at the history of bands who have become wildly popular after being together for some sensible time, they get popular after they get a better drummer.

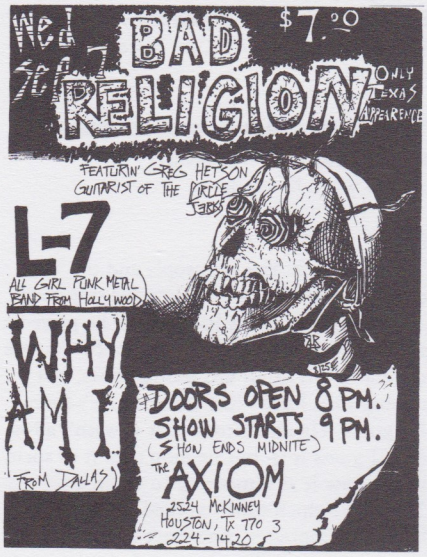
But often they also drop drummers on the verge of major label deals, so they never give them a chance.
I disagree. What about Nirvana? It's sad, because maybe I'm talking shit about the drummer, but no, I'm just saying, look, these guys are just mega-talented.

There's no doubt that Dave Grohl is talented.
Wildly so.

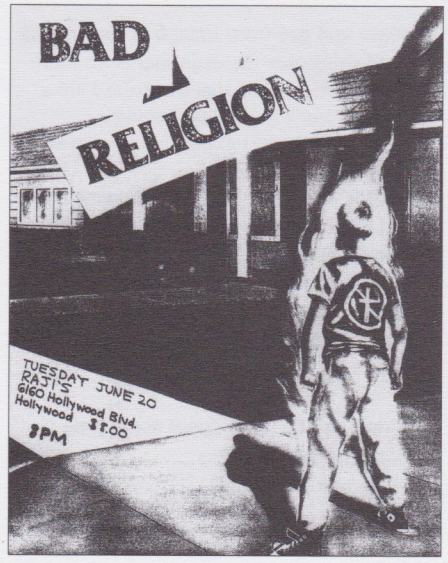
It's night and day from *Bleach* to *Nevermind*.
Right. I think that the drummer is far more important, but maybe that's because I am a bass player, but I think that having a mediocre drummer is going to hold you back.

Green Day kept their drummer, however, it seems like he underwent some serious practice or even lessons from the indie records period to their major label records period.
I think Trey is a good drummer. We did a lot of tours with them.

But don't you think he spent some time working on his chops?
But isn't that respectable?







Yeah, but what I'm saying is that they did not cut him loose from the band.
But, why would they? He's a good drummer.

But with bands like the Replacements, they got on major labels, cut loose their drummers in the midst of being popular, and within a record or two dissolved.
Well, I understand. In that sense, it is a pretty ugly scenario that seems to be happening quite often, so maybe there's someone like me on a major label, a drum shark who swims around and anytime a band is signed, they go, your drummer sucks, we've got another drummer for you. They insert some other drummer to help them along. I feel bad, but I think it's far more important than most people think. Having a good drummer is very important.

But it's not just the drummer, but the rhythm section that comes to mind when I think of classic soul and Motown records.
But see, you're talking about James Jamerson, who was the bass player on everything, so it's not really a rhythm section, it's just him. It would be like, what if Flea was in every band? That wouldn't make anybody very happy. You know, everybody sounds like Flea. But, in that sense, in Motown or a lot of that early stuff, there was a standard to play with, and for most of us, the standard was just learn what you can from everybody and then create your own style. I think that is something that even all the guitar players got, which was create something on your own from out of everything that you can learn from everybody else.

Do you think that Bad Religion has to bear the burden of its fans a lot more than Green Day or Blink 182?
No, I don't think so. I think for every ten hate letters I get, Green Day must get thousands.

I remember an ad that was once placed in fanzines. It had a picture of bombs, and said something like, the people who make these bombs are the same people who make Bad Religion records. Was that a low blow?
These are things that I have put aside, because I find them redundant. The whole thing that everyone seems to have an innate ability to do is complain. But being pro-active seems to be the most difficult thing to do. It's a lot more easy to complain about something to do anything differently.

Someone in the band said, "Very infrequently are people actually spending time making a better life." Is that what you're saying- don't complain, go out and make yourself a better life?
I don't personally care what anybody does. I make my better life, right? 9 times out of 10 people that are complaining are trying to rain on my better life, and I won't let them. It doesn't bother me. I don't mean that in an angry way. I don't mean I shut myself off to the world, or I am a recluse that doesn't pay attention. I hear them. I hear exactly what everybody says to me, but at some point or another, I'll go, you basically have just reduced yourself to nothing more than a slobbering fanatic who is mad because we have a video on MTV. But, you admitted to watching MTV, and that's why you're mad about it, so I don't need to have this conversation anymore, right? Like, I saw you on MTV, you fucking sell out! What? I don't even see me on MTV. You know? I don't! So I just kind of laugh and go, whatever. People that do that…Well, I understand that, because when I was 15 I was very mad at X for playing at the Greek Theater, because I liked seeing them at the Whiskey. And how dare they go play the fucking Greek Theater where I have to sit up on the grass nine miles away, fuck those guys. That was when I was 15, so now I am over that obviously, I understand a bit better about reality *(starts laughing)* and dynamics, but it doesn't mean that people don't feel that way, and that's what I always say to them, I understand how you feel. I really do, but I don't agree with it, but I understand how you feel. And someday you'll realize, yeah, I guess that was pretty stupid.

Do you feel connected more with those late-1970s punk bands like X rather than…
I don't feel connected with them at all, because they are actually so much older than I am that when they were in their heyday, I was fifteen. Bad Religion and all those bands weren't playing at the same time…

But Greg was already making music with Red Kross during the late-1970s, so there was really only a few years difference sometimes.
If you talk about X, the Screamers, Black Flag, and the Germs, I never got a chance to know those people. If you go to the Adolescents, Social Distortion, and TSOL, those are the people I ran around with in L.A.

You've seen the reformed Adolescents and TSOL?
Yeah.

But you've said, I don't want to be in a band that does the reunion tours.
I was talking to somebody else about this. They had this *Flipside* benefit in L.A. that everybody played at. A 25th anniversary thing. So many bands played, but the best band that night by far were the Adolescents.

All original line-up, right?
Yes. And I sat there and watched them play and said, I don't know why these guys ever broke up. I don't why they stopped playing. Obviously, they couldn't get past whatever problem they were having, they never got over it. But they were the greatest fucking band ever. Ever. It was just a total…There's no word to describe how disappointing it is that they didn't stay together and didn't make more records together and continue on, because they are the best band from that generation.

Do you think by Bad Religion constantly putting out records and just being around has

helped these other bands like TSOL and the others to come back?
I don't know.

You know, provide them a young audience?
Okay, I'll go with that. But I don't think like that.

How typical is it for an 18 year old to really like bands made up of guys in their 40s?
How old was Black Flag when I was seeing them? They must have been 35.

But the Dictators, who are touring, are at least in their 40s.
But I'm not going to see them.

But punk primarily spoke to young people.
Maybe it's admirable that people are willing to go out and see where this all came from. That's obvious, when you stop and think that in the last five years some of the biggest bands in the world have been "punk rock" bands, whether it's Blink 182, Green Day, or the Offspring. These guys are coming out here espousing punk rock, and so maybe it's actually having a trickle down effect where people are listening to these bands and going, but where did they come from? I know that by 1992, when people were actually talking to us about where we came from, because no one had any idea that we had been around for 12 years, I kept saying the Adolescents are the best band in the world, even though they had broken up ten years previously. I just felt a responsibility to let everyone know, yeah you might like us, but the Adolescents are the best band in the world. So I try not to take responsibility for anything. The bands that are coming back now and doing these tours are doing it because we've been doing it for 22 years? I just think more along the lines that alternative, or "punk," is now a mainstay, and not a fad. It's a real, viable source of music.

The major press always said that punk musicians couldn't play, and never took punk seriously. But it has been elevated to a degree where people respect the music.
Well, fuck that. There's two different theories why that happened. One is that people who are our age have come to be editors at magazines. Well, they are now coming into their own. So they are saying, we liked this when we were younger and it is not stupid and not mundane. On the flip side of that, the same people who were saying ten years ago that punk was shit and you guys suck are now saying we're great because they have to. This is what sells their magazines. It's what the kids want. You see? They have to suck ass now and say, you guys are great. Yeah, but twelve years ago you said we were shit. Well, now you're great! Well, I have to say that because it sells more magazines. It makes me look cooler if I say that.

So, that goes back to your first statement that the business is all bullshit?
It's all bullshit. From top to bottom, and it doesn't have anything to do with me. That's what's so funny about it. When magazines pan bands, and it's not even me, it's any band, but a few years later they got them on the cover because they're selling 17 million records, you tell me if that's hypocritical. It's like, you're just rolling with the tide. You're not standing by anything. You're like, I guess we better put them on the cover if we want to sell 100,000 copies. If not, we can just insert not popular artist here.

Are you happy that you never gave in to trends and put out a rap-influenced record, or a reggae-inspired record?
We don't have the talent to do that. With Bad Religion, the one thing that we found out was that the best thing we do is Bad Religion.

So why vary from the form?
Well, I think we like to push the envelope of what we think Bad Religion is, but we're certainly not David Bowie. You know? We are not going to change our entire platform with every record. That's not for me, and I don't think that's for the rest of the guys. I think that we just look at this as something that we really just enjoy doing and in the sense we are not looking for anything else to make us happy, or to catch up with something or be part of a scene. People have always said that. You know, you keep putting out the same records over and over again. But we did that for twelve years and nobody noticed. And we were perfectly content to do it and not get paid.

But that's like saying that AC/DC has churned out the same record for their entire career.
You know what, no. Maybe they have, I don't know. I like what we do.

You haven't always liked what Bad Religion has done.
I didn't like *Into the Unknown* and I wasn't that clear with *The New America*. I wasn't sure. It wasn't that I didn't like it, it was just that I didn't know why I was doing it, and that was confusing.

So it wasn't the music per se.
It wasn't the music, it was just I said- why I am doing this? Am I doing it for money, am I doing it for…I don't even know why. I can't be doing it for money, because I know I could make a hell of a lot more money if I stopped playing music and went out and got a real job. You know?

Or you could join Guns and Roses.
No, because then I'd have to play with that guy, and that's not going to happen.

How long have you been in Vancouver?
7 years.

That's nowhere near L.A. Are you there for peace of mind and geographic distance?
It has nothing to do with me. It's totally for my family. It's totally for my wife and kids. It has nothing to do with me. I like it there because it's a really nice place.

But if the family could be in L.A., would you move back?
No, I don't think I'd ever move back to L.A. Not now. I had a hard time leaving, but once you leave L.A., there really isn't anything there for you unless you have enough money to disappear. It's not for me. There are so many people that it's too many people, and I don't think you realize that when you live there, but when you go away and come back you get this overwhelming…

But Vancouver is a big city.
Not nearly as big. There are 2 million people there, and 10 million in L.A. And 2 million people in Vancouver is like British Columbia, the entire province. Trust me. It's a totally different ball game.

After this tour, what can we expect from Bad Religion?
We get three weeks off, not really, more like two weeks and change. Then we go to Europe and start the same thing there.

Brett isn't playing on all the European shows.
Just like he's not going to be playing on all the American shows. He's putting his schedules together to say, this is when I come out, here's when I can't.

Do you change the set lists for those nights?
No. I just tell him what sets we're playing each night, so he can add songs and take them out. It's up to him to learn them.

How organic are the sets?
We'll make a set list and then it will transform.

I mean, there's twenty years worth of stuff.
There's a core of what we want to do, which is seven or eight songs off of the *Process of Belief*, and we'll play that many songs off the new album because it's fun.

But you're not simply hawking product when you play live?
No, and it has nothing to do with that. This is more just for us because it's fun. Trust me, when I say, we'll play one song off of *New America*, because that's not fun to play.

What about *Suffer*?
As many songs as we can fit in. So when we were doing sound check today for two hours with Brooks, we played the entire *Process of Belief* album and then jumped right to *Stranger than Fiction* on down. We didn't play anything off *Gray Race*, wait, we did play "Them and Us," and then we played everything from *Stranger Than Fiction* backwards.

So why not the later period stuff?
Brooks has just kind of learned everything up to that point. He learned everything from *How Could Hell Be Any Worse* up to *Stranger than Fiction*. We made him learn "Them and Us," which he did. But if you asked him to name you a song off of *No Substance*, He would just stare at you and go, I don't think I have even seen it *(laughs)*. I think when

Brooks came into the band, it was so much easier for me to call Epitaph and my friends and say, hey, send this guy the catalog so he can learn the record, then when I called Atlantic and asked if they could send our new drummer our catalog off of Atlantic, they said, who are you? I was like, never mind. I'll just have him go out and buy them himself, which, of course, he's not going to do. That kind of settled it.

Would you say the band has the best relationship amongst yourselves than in the last several years?
Yeah, by far.

How will it be possible to keep it that way?
I don't know. Shit happens, that's just the truth. Things happen when you are at your most miserable. Something can just snap and it's over, or something can happen and it's the unbearable lightness of being, and everything is wonderful and you don't know why. Obviously, when you are in a band as long as we have been together, you see just about anything you could ever see, both sides, everywhere, every up and down, everything in the middle, and right now it's a good one.

Does seeing the Adolescents make you say, I feel glad about where I come from and glad about the music I play?
I say it when I see them, and I say it when I see us. I say it when I'm listening to...

Do you listen to Bad Religion records?
I listen to this one, surprisingly, which I don't ever do. I don't like our music, but I listen to this record. I shouldn't say I don't like it, I don't listen to the records because I get burned out of them after awhile, and then I just don't listen to them anymore. You can't listen to them for 600 times in a row. I'm glad about where we came from, I don't really know where it is. It's a strange spot. I was talking to someone else about this. They were talking like, Oh I thought you were from Hollywood. I was like, no, we're from the Valley. I think that by the time that 1988 rolled by, there was no nowhere to be from, you know what I mean. Everything was dead. So, we weren't a part of anything anymore. By the time we did *Suffer*, there was nothing to a part of.

Graffin said, "*Suffer* re-solidified our status and re-energized the whole punk scene."
That's way too much.

But you did say it happened during a low point in the scene.
But just because we made a record that made me happy, I wouldn't ever have the balls to say...

But it seemed to make a lot of people happy.
We only sold 3,000 records.

That's not bad for the time.
Yeah, that's not bad for the time. But it's not what everybody thinks it was. It didn't reinvigorate anything *(laughs)*. We went out on a tour and lost 1,000 dollars each playing for 80 people a night. There was no re-invigoration. I think people look back at the record now, or for the past, and say, what a great time that was. But you weren't there. No one was there. Crickets were there, and tumbleweeds, and nothing else.

So people are putting a little gloss on it.
I think that sometimes people get a little misty and glossy and think, oh man, what a great time. Bullshit. There was nothing. Zero. So it wasn't like trying to be part of anything. I don't even know why the hell we made the record other than it was fucking great. You know? It took us six days, for no other reason than just to do it, which is cool. That is almost how we made *Process of Belief.*

You could tie the two albums together in terms of spontaneity and natural feel...
Like, we got nothing to lose. Let's just go...

In a way, you came full circle?
Well, yeah, five or six times *(laughs)*. It keeps happening. I don't know why. There will be another seven year stretch and things will fall apart, then after awhile it will all come back together. Fuck no, that's not going to happen.

Do you want to retire soon from Bad Religion, or retire from music all together?
I don't know. I never think about how long I will go on. I've been saying that I can't really imagine doing this at a certain point, but I don't know what that certain point is. Like, what I said last year, when I just did not understand why I was here, there will come a point when I will know it well before everyone else, and if the band's not ready, but I am ready, I'm just going to walk, because that's okay. And I think, one of the other things was last year when Bob left and it seemed over, it was thoroughly depressing because it was almost like going out with a whimper. You know? Just a fucking mediocre record, and just all the shit, and it just felt like BLAH, crap. All that stuff meant nothing. It was weird. It just kind of fizzled, and after this record was made, Brett and I were talking and I told him, this is the kind of record that I could retire on, where could say, I am happy about this...

And walk away?
Yes. Walk away. Just like turn off the lights, thanks. I don't know if that means I will or not. Brett already called me and started to talk about the next record, like, okay, on the next record, and I said, hey, I am still enjoying this one. Give me a couple months. Let's go out and play and do all this. There is something to be said, and it's not to slight everything that this band has accomplished, because I think we have done a hell of a lot for guys from a garage in the valley, because when the core is together, it works, and that's undeniable. I don't why, but it really is something special.

But when it doesn't?
When it doesn't it's really not good, but right now, the machine is up and running.

So instead of planning ahead, you're enjoying the run while you have it?
The one thing I told myself that I was going to do, well, when we made *Suffer* I was too young, dumb, and drunk to really appreciate it. I had a great time, because as you said, everybody looks back and glosses it and makes it all flowery, so I get to kind of smile and say, yes it was. I can remember that. I can remember sitting in the truck stop with no money drinking ketchup and hot water, saying to Brett, why am I here? At the same time, I can remember playing football and the shit we did, but I am going to try and enjoy this. This is really what people try to do this for. I know it doesn't make a lot of sense. But when you are having fun and things are working well, no matter what you're doing, whether you are playing music or you have a hockey team, or you're inventing some software, or you're a silkscreener, or whatever it is, when things are running well, it just seems like fun.

There's a great quote from a Hal Hartley film, "If you do not enjoy your job, it will eat you alive."
You know what. You know when people ask me to this day, what was it exactly that happened between Bad Religion and Epitaph, why did you guys leave? I say, we were all having a good time but that was eating us alive because it was growing too fast. Super painful growth spurt. Your feet are a size 15 in a size 8 shoe. That was how it was and we all kind of felt it. We got to get out of this suit. It's not working. We didn't know what to do. So that was scary and confusing and exciting and weird at the same time. That's one of those things where there was nothing you could do about it, either you roll with it and grow, or fail. That's your two choices.

It seemed like the right choice to move to Atlantic?
We didn't have a lot of options. We really didn't. I was working at Epitaph when all this was happening, so there was a family style bond between Bad Religion and Epitaph because it was our label, well, it was Brett's, but it was ours. I have a very profound respect and admiration for what that label has done, because going from a napkin on a dining room table.

Figures and accounting on the table?
No, it was just the logo, the first E logo on a napkin, to be put on the first Bad Religion record and the first 7", to becoming a label that people wanted to be on, which was weird to us, like people want to be on our label? That was really bizarre, to everything that happened with the Offspring and beyond, where you just go, this is impossible. It's never been done before.



Photo by Kevin Scanlon

The Offspring really hit the big time after Brett left the band.
But that's why.

So it seemed like the right move for the band and him?
It's not coincidental. Everybody had thought long and hard about what they were going to do. You'd be surprised to know that the fuse that started that entire chain reaction was Gregg saying, I don't want to go back to school, I want to tour more. Graffin had been in school every year since the beginning of time, which basically allowed us to tour during spring break and the summer, and during the summer it was getting shorter and shorter because we all have kids, so all of a sudden the tour frame was becoming tiny, which was fine. I was working at Epitaph and we'd go out and play shows here and there now and then, and when we did tour it was very stressful. I remember being on the road and having Fletcher from Pennywise mad because I did a wrong thing on their record because I was in charge of production at Epitaph, and I was bummed because I was like, I am out here and can't do anything about it, so roll with it. But when Gregg said that he wanted to tour more, that started it, because I said, okay, I am going to quit Epitaph because I want to tour more too. I want to be a bass player, not a desk jockey, right. But Brett couldn't tour more, the label was burgeoning and he knew that. He knew he had to leave, and there was nothing he could about it. The question was, how are we going to go about all this? And what we couldn't seem to get to was that let's go to an Italian restaurant, have a few bottles of wine, and talk about where we are all at right now, and what we want to do, and how we are going to get there. Instead, we had, what's very typical for us, this immature blow up, which led to Brett quitting and us leaving and everything being hostile, and airing dirty laundry, like ex-girlfriend type shit. None of it was anything that anybody didn't already know, and it didn't really matter, but it just seemed so bizarre. But now, here we are, and we are in the exact same scenario, we're on tour, but Brett can't come on tour, but he's not hostile or mad about it. He's like, I can't come, and we're, okay dude, whenever you can come out, we'll see you later. We'll carry a guitar for you, we'll find a place on stage and mark a little X for you so any time you're ready to come out we're ready to roll. We couldn't seem to get to that spot then, and that's too bad, but you know what? That was the first thing Brett and I talked about when we got into a room alone, and we were sitting there kind of talking after eight years. I said, if things didn't happen they way that they did, we wouldn't be here right now, so I don't feel bad about anything that happened and I don't carry any resentment or hostility. That stuff was no different than any other stuff we did, or fights we had, when we were fifteen, eighteen or nineteen. Graffin and I used to get into fistfights, and it didn't break the band up. It's just the way it is. And he said, you're right, and I said, so we're just happy to be here.

It's just about looking each other in the eye and saying, you're the same kid I grew up with in the valley?
Totally. Every time some one would ask me and we would get into this war of words, or Brett said this, and I'd have something to come back with, he'd come back with something, but at the end of the day, he's still the guy I spent fifteen years of my life being out on the road with, experiencing things that only band mates can experience. So you're no longer just buds from the valley, you are family. I've spent more time with these guys than I have with my own children. That's pretty radical, that's a pretty heavy thing to say, and I don't say it proudly, I say it factually. So even though we seem to be in a problematic world with each other, it didn't make the reality go away that we're really family no matter what.

And that probably comes across best on this record. The previous records seemed a bit processed and forced.
You know what I think? *Stranger than Fiction* was a great record, but I think in a sense, it was a great record for Brett.



We went out on a tour and lost 1,000 dollars each playing for 80 people a night. There was no re-invigoration. I think people look back at the record now, or for the past while, and say, what a great time that was. But you weren't there. No one was there. Crickets were there, and tumbleweeds, and nothing else.

He wrote all the singles.
He wrote all the singles. In a sense, that was the record he wrote and retired on.

The one he could walk off on?
Right. Fuck it, I did it and I'm out of here, and I can hold my head up, which was great. I think Gregg did an amazing job with the *Gray Race*, and Brian Baker brought an amazing amount of guitar work to that album as well. I think Brian stepped up as the new guy, not trying to write new songs, but bringing a lot of new talent and there's some ideas that Gregg would not have thought of on his own. I think that album is a sleeper, and people will go back and go, that is a great fucking record. *No Substance*, what can five guys do in the studio given an insane amount of time and nothing better to do? That's what that record was. That's a fact. I don't mean that as a slag, that's a reality.

But the *Gray Race* b-sides, like "The Dodo," are great.
Fucking great. The choruses are weak, but the beginning and the verse of the Dodo is amazing, but the reason that song failed is because the chorus was weak. Once that, "It's the way of the Dodo" kicked in, it was like no, you lost me there, because you had me going with that "I see a white haired man, he's got a suit on him…" and I'm going with it, then it opens up into this fruity melodic thing, and it's like, that's too bad. Sorry. Next. But that's why it goes away. The one song that I think of when I think of songs that are b-sides, well, I think there's two songs now, but I think that "The Fast Life" is a great song that did not go on the record, and "News From the Front" from Stranger Than Fiction. Those were two great songs. And Andy Wallace, when he heard that "News from the Front" hadn't made it on the record said, you've got to be joking. I just looked at him and said, unfortunately, it's not. We say that till this day, "Oh, you're joking."

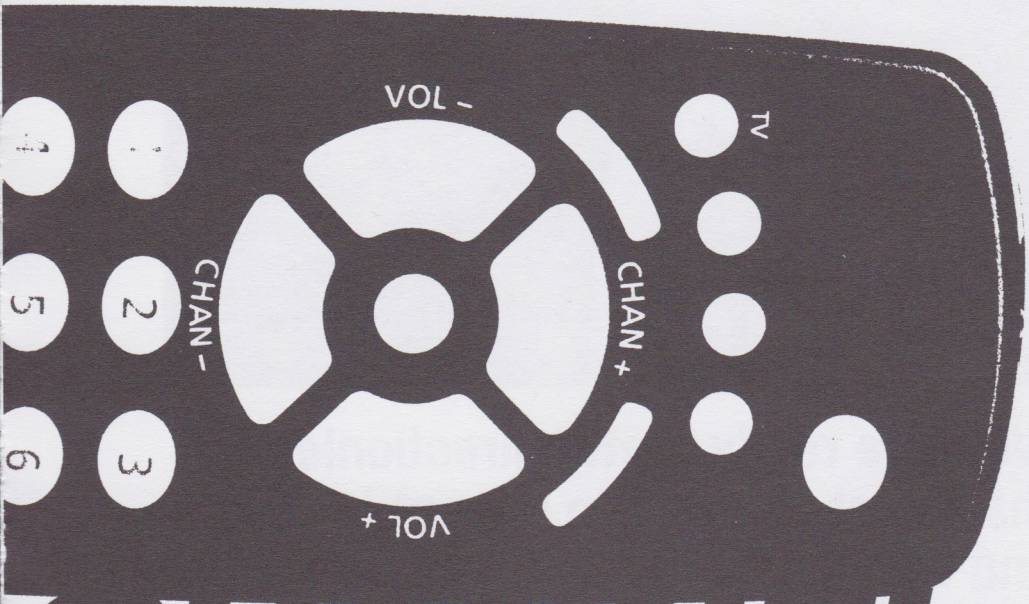
You could have sold another million copies!
I don't know about that, but I thought that it was a great song.

It's for the box set.
We've tried to generally put everything we've recorded out somewhere. I think there's maybe three songs at most that kind of disappeared, that we played a couple of times, but we didn't record them.

There are so many bands that hide things in the vaults, and you have to wait for bootlegs.
Trust me, I think people have this impression that we make these albums…

You recorded sixty songs, but only released twenty!
No, you just throw everything out there that you can. I think that some of the songs, well like on this album, I think there's two or three songs that didn't go on this one, one of them because Brett didn't like the way it came out, and he wrote it. He goes, I didn't like the way turned out, and I want to save it, and I don't want to put it out anywhere, but try it again later. Try again on the next record and see if we can't do it better. I kind of thought, that was part of that next record discussion we were having, and I laughed and said, I like the optimism, the idea that we will be making a next record. So, we already have a song *(laughs)*. That's one down. I'm not really thinking about that at all. I'm not really thinking about anything right now.

And that's a good place?
Yes, it is. I don't think about anything.



CHANNEL THREE

Okay, so go spend some hard-earned soiled green dollars on Posh Boy.com, the site of that notorious punk swindler, and get Channel 3's *Skinhead Years*, a bible of early 1980s California punk rock. It's gutsy without being thickheaded and cliché, rockin' in the same vein as sped-up MC5 and the Saints, and although a bit on the dated side, it's no less important than TSOL, Agent Orange, and the Adolescents. And take heed, the guys have been in the studio concocting a new batch of fireworks that will soon be available on Dr. Strange records.

It seems fair to assume that Channel 3 has always been a revolving door of musicians with you and Kimm at the helm, not unlike Tony and Chip Kinman (Dils) and their projects. What exactly has kept you two glued together musically since grade school?
Well, besides our shared appreciation of fine spirits, I suppose Kimm and I have stayed together because we were friends before the thought of a band entered our minds. We've always had the same idea of where we wanted to be with our music, and although there always seems to be influences pulling on you in different directions, we've been the last ones standing. I guess that's the nice thing about being has-beens, now nobody gives a fuck what we do!

Like TSOL and the Adolescents, you have returned full-tilt to the music world, but what would you say makes you stand apart from your brethren of the early '80s hardcore scene?
We were never really the standard hardcore thrash band. From our very first recordings, you can hear evidence of our love of everything from cheesy metal to cheesy pop! We actually had all those poppy songs from the beginning, but Posh packaged the first EP to showcase the harsher side.

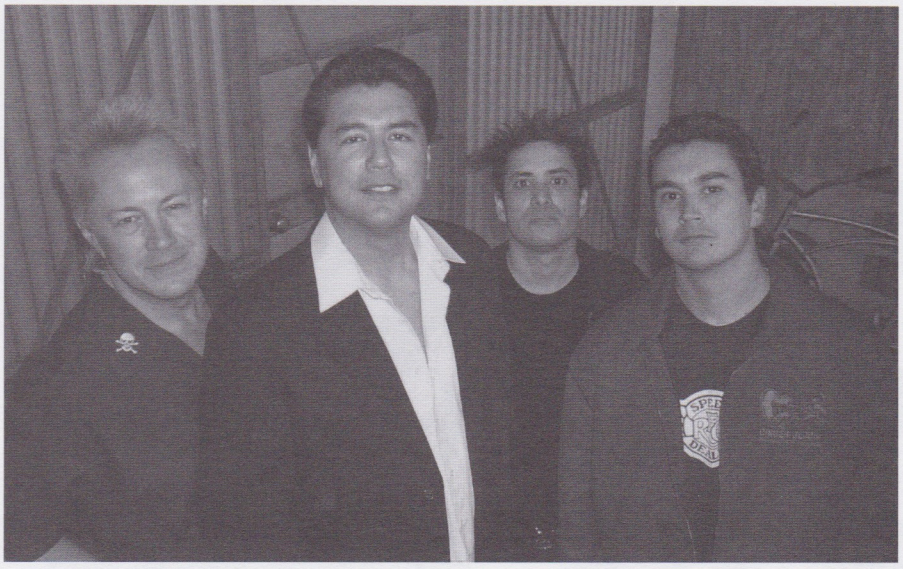
You guys were not some *Surburbia*-inspired, drop out losers that the media loved to pounce on, but Long Beach State University

grads. Were education and book smarts one of the driving forces behind the band in terms of lyrics and ideas, or would you have been the same band without the schooling?
I suppose the way we grew up influenced the momentum behind the band. I don't know if education influenced any of the ideas behind lyrics, really, but it makes it easier to express angst when you know how to spell angst! As far as the popularity of the band in the '80s, Kimm was really the organizational mastermind. His ability to communicate and manage, a direct product of his college education, allowed us to promote, tour, package, etc. Sorta like a Junior Greg Ginn, but with a pocket flask and a condom in the wallet!

The first EP, including five songs, was recorded in four hours. Is it possible to mimic that kind of spontaneity and gusto now when recording the new CD?
Hell, this time it took four hours to decide what to order from the Thai place for lunch! Actually, we were really aware of trying to go for that energy this time around, and Lord knows it shows for better or worse! I don't think we'd ever be able to reproduce that initial awe and adrenaline of being in a real recording studio, not to mention trying to play a guitar while Robbie Fields glared at you through Ray Bans behind the glass!

In fact, Posh Boy signed the band before you even played clubs. Did you actually believe that the band would make an impact and the record would open up all those possibilities?
We were really pretty directionless at that point, content to play at keggers and fold corduroy flares at the Wild West Store…It was really just a fluke that we even recorded a demo and that it ended up with Posh. To have a record out and suddenly be playing at the huge shows with all the bands we were paying to see just months before was pretty cool. But like most things, once you become aware of the impact you are creating and try to manipulate it, it suddenly disappears…

Posh Boy has gotten a terrible reputation over the years, but it seemed to have served you well for a time. Without the artwork of Kevin Walker (TSOL, CH. 3) and the decisions to follow Posh Boys' advice on songs like "You Make Me Feel Cheap" (with Maria Montoya), do you think CH. 3 could have done the tours and been as popular as Black Flag?
The thing about Posh Boy, regardless of his business dealings with the bands, he had a tremendous string of hot releases at that time. For us to release on Posh hot on the heels of the Rodney comps, TSOL, and Agent Orange just gave us a huge head start. Back then, I think people would automatically buy the latest from Posh just to see what he had his eye on next! I'm glad we had a hand in stopping that trend, eh?



We were really pretty directionless at that point, content to play at keggers and fold corduroy flares at the Wild West Store…It was really just a fluke that we even recorded a demo.

When you were signed to No Future and hit the indie charts with "I've Got a Gun," did you feel a little strange about the fact that instead of people paying a lot of attention in your back yard, people, including many skinheads, were idolizing you across the ocean?
We didn't even know about that release until we saw a poster on the wall with different artwork for the EP. Then we saw the NME with the record actually on the charts, a rave review (by Wattie, no less!), and an offer to tour with Blitz over there! Yeah, I guess you could say it was strange. We were afraid we'd have to change our name or this other CH3 would sue us!

You recently said that "Manzanar" was "a political song that came from the personal. It was something in my family." Could you describe/explain?
My mother is Japanese, as a matter of fact. Although she was born in this country, she had to pack up and go to the internment camp with all the rest of my relatives following Pearl Harbor. Seemed like a pretty interesting time in US history that few kids really knew about.

Why would you have to be "young and naive to write like that?"
Well, it's not really being young and naive to write about the situation, but the terms used at the time, such as comparing it to the concentration camps, was a bit over the top! That was one of our first songs, and we hadn't quite yet learned to take a broad topic and pare it down to the personal specific. It's pretty interesting in the light of 9/11 and all the talk of ethnic profiling now. But hell, when you're 18 years old it's more fun to say fuck the government and pass me another beer!

"Indian Summer," one of CH 3's most widely known songs, was recorded practically off the cuff just days before the album *Something to Believe In* went to print. How did that happen?
I think we beat Mark and Shawn in a drinking contest and they had to let us be on the record! We used to get a lot of requests to be on comps, but the BYO guys are friends and we happened to be working on a few songs with no label (between Posh and Enigma) in sight. It was a fun night and a chance to finally work with Thom Wilson, so why not? The session was memorable for Snickers (RIP, The Klan, Simpletones) entertaining us with his lip tattoos.

How close were you to the bevy of BYO bands, or to bands across North America like the Big Boys, Kraut, and Stretch Marks?
I guess you pegged the bands we got along with right there, pal. Back then touring was kinda like playing hopscotch from one friendly scene to the next, so it helped to have contacts with cool bands across the continent. It's more notable, though, the bands that didn't like us. We found it difficult to sit up half the night talking politics with the local anar-



chists in their squat, when truthfully we'd rather be getting laid by the new wave chicks from the cosmetology school!

Like TSOL, you jumped ship to Enigma, and like them, you received a lot of bad press from the underground. Do you regret that period all (TSOL has totally obliterated those songs from their sets), or the choice to record songs like your Aerosmith cover?

You know, we still think those are some rockin songs on those crazy platters, and I mean that in a good way! The song writing was no different, but add the extra thousands in production and liberally apply Aqua Net Pink, and there ya go! Like TSOL, a main regret was not releasing that periods stuff under a different name, since it was a totally different project, really. You can understand the record company's reluctance to do that, but it made for some shows that confused the hell out of the kids, especially those that had been in a coma for a couple months! We still play some of those songs in our set, though the Aerosmith cover is difficult since it had 27 guitars layered on it!

In 1997, there was a terrible air crash over your hometown that showered debris down on a neighborhood. Were you around at the time, and did the plane crash in Queens earlier this year seem like a horrible echo of the event?

Pretty awful stuff though we only initially heard about it from the TV, then ran for the window. We had some good friends that witnessed this rain of body parts and it really traumatized the people who were there. There was an ill-fated benefit concert later that year and we finally got a chance to play in the school gym…

While books like *American Hardcore* totally pass up the real impact of the band, do feel at least a bit vindicated when bands like Yo La Tengo cover "Out of Control" and mixed generations of people come to your shows?

That was strange, that cover they did, huh? My first thought was, "hey! Them intellectuals is makin' fun of us, Pa!" But after hearing it, I can understand how they wanted at least one driving song in their set list! Kidding, kidding…Kimm and I have gotten used to getting looked over–we actually prefer it now, or at least that's the company policy we're sticking to. Our big problem is how we're not considered an OC band, and then people don't see us an LA band either. You can rest assured that when VH1 makes the Behind the Music of the whole Norwalk/Artesia/Cerritos scene, we'll be right there!

Like Articles of Faith, CH 3 released an album on Lone Wolf records and Lost and Found. Have you spoken to people like Vic Bondi over the years?

We haven't heard a goddamn thing from anybody East of the Rockies in a decade! That's chthree.com, people! Write in and leave us a good recipe for Penne Puttanesca!

Will there ever be a full discography set available? Can you get all the publishing rights back?

What, do you have a microphone hidden in our conference room? We were just talking about that, but the profile of who would want the whole set frightens us! I mean, really-aren't these the same people who translate the King James Bible into Klingon? We would like to get the entire mess back in house, but it's a bit tough since Posh still presses the *Skinhead Years*, and we don't have the resources to collect all the stuff. Perhaps one day there'll be a box set, a limited edition thing shaped like disappointment itself, whatever that means!

Even though CH 3 never really broke up (playing at least once a year), and even toured Europe in 1994, why did you wait until you were both forty to pursue it more seriously/full-time?

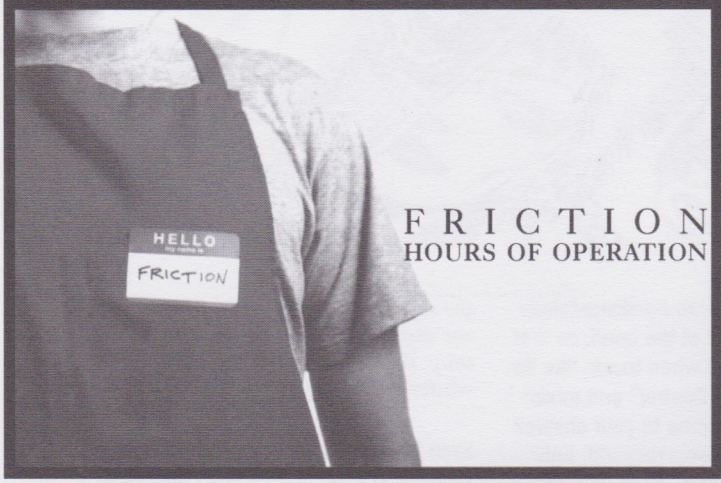
Hey David, thanks a lot for letting everyone we're forty, ya bastard! It just kinda happened, all this recent activity with the band. Besides our yearly benefit shows, we did a show to launch the website, and that lead to the benefit show with TSOL, and that lead to the shows with Misfits, Samoans, Adolescents, China White and every other goddam band with maturity on their side! We took this opportunity to make the new CD since we didn't want to look like a bunch of geezers just getting by on the old hits, although we are looking forward to taking over the lead in EFX at the MGM Grand someday or at least getting into the county fair circuit! The CD is all done and we're really pleased with it. As soon as I black out the adult words on the lyric sheet my daughter can take it into class for show and tell!

How exactly did you end up floating your van down the Colorado River one Memorial Day?

That's a long story to save for another day, buddy. But the main point is the van floated, and the bet was won!







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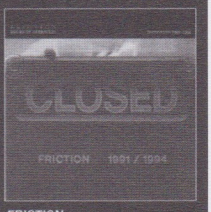
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BACK AND FORTH WITH BRIAN BAKER



For many kids of my generation, roughly 1985-89, which is an almost lost network of post-hardcore kids, Dag Nasty were the melodic, dyed-blonde version of Minor Threat. They were good-looking and sing-along styled, and even when leaning towards posicore vibes (though not like those damn hoodies wearing flat top jockheads), there was an earnest, unashamed poetry that Dave Smalley could drum up easily as making tacos. When Smalley bolted and made the first All record with former Descendents personnel, Dag Nasty grabbed Pete Cortner, an Echo and the Bunnymen type fellow, and they slowed down their approach, creating D.C.'s first wave of mesmerizing on-target pop that was soon embodied by other label mates like 3 and Shudder to Think. Dag nasty re-united for the first time in the neon blare of Los Angeles (hmm...1992...Let's forget about that) but disappeared until this past year, when they returned to reclaim their place in the sun.

When I ran into you at the Bad Religion show and you told me about the new Dag Nasty record, you described it as their *Process of Belief* in terms of how good everyone felt about the record. Could you explain that a bit?

Well, I think that the *Process of Belief* is by far the best Bad Religion record I have ever been on and everybody knew in the band when we were making it that it was going to be very cool. We were really excited about it. Now, it comes out and it seems pretty much everyone else thinks it's the best record we've done since I have been in the band. With Dag Nasty, I think it is pretty much the same thing. I really worked hard to try and make it a great record and everything fell together so great in the studio and while we were making it we were really excited and then once we finished it, everyone who has heard it has been like, Jesus, this the best thing you guys have done since *Can I Say*. I'm like, okay. That's why I made the comparison because it's a similar energy in the studio where everyone is just so fucking happy to be there. Talk about a smooth time when there's nothing to argue about because everything is so cool. That's when it is really fun.

What makes this record so different from 1992's *Four on the Floor*?

Four on the Floor was done like, well, basically, it's kind of explained in the liner notes. We didn't really plan on making a record, everyone was kind of hanging out in L.A., and we were like, maybe we should try and jam or something and the next thing you know Brett at Epitaph was like, you guys can make a record. So basically within ten days we tried to cobble together a bunch of songs, we didn't really get to rehearse, but ran into a studio and made a record that half of it is okay, but the other half really isn't. We really didn't put in the time and effort that is necessary to make a good record. It was kind of this fun vacation project and we weren't really thinking of it as something to carry on the legacy of Dag Nasty. It was more like someone recording us jamming and screwing around. There's a lot of songs on that record that are pieces of old songs that we had in 1985, and it just wasn't the same kind of thing. This record that we just did now, *Minority of One*, we're definitely aware that we couldn't just put out another like, hi, we just felt like doing a record, thing. We needed it



Maybe we'll do one every two years for the next ten years. We'll be the Steely Dan of punk rock.

to be something we put a lot of effort into. I spent months writing this record, throwing away stuff and writing more stuff. We attacked this record like we had something to prove and I think we did, because I don't think that *Four on the Floor* is any good. I think it's a piece of shit, if you really want my opinion.

But even on the new record, you guys didn't play together until you hit the studio. At least that's how I understand it from the studio notes on the Dag Nasty web site.

It was the first time we were physically in a room together, but unlike the other experience, I had made copious demos, and everybody had all the songs for a long period of time. Everybody was doing independent study. It wasn't like everybody plugged in and was like, how does this song go? I mean I made tapes of drum and bass without the guitar for Roger, I made guitar and bass tapes without drums for Colin, so those guys spent weeks and weeks learning the songs on their own, so when we came together we wouldn't have to waste expensive studio time. But, you know, the effort was still there. We just didn't happen to be rehearsing at the same time. This is not rocket science. These guys are good enough musicians, you don't really need to…Well, you can do this on your own. It proved itself because we went and plugged in and said, okay, let's do this one song, and everybody played it. That was the whole point. There were some limitations with everyone living in different cities. It's kind of hard to get a good rehearsal schedule together.

Why did it feel like it was a good time and place to do it, instead of say, two years ago?

It's a combination of things. Basically, we did this compilation a few years ago.

1999?

Right, we got together to do that. It went really smooth and it was fun and that one song, to me, "Incinerate," was better than the entire *Four on the Floor* record and most of *Field Day* as far as I was concerned. That was just one song, and so when it came out as good as it did, and we had such a good time making it, we said, we should do another record at some point. And we were all like, yeah, let's do another record at some point and kind of left it at that. Well, Colin ran with that idea and he had a friend at Revelation who was basically hanging out with him and said, well, if you want to do a Dag Nasty record, I guess we'd do one. Colin called me up and said, you know if you want to do a record, we've got a label already without even having to look. I was like, that's cool, let's do another record, so we all agreed we'd do another one, but I kind of just kept procrastinating and screwing around. Eventually, last summer, right around the time I was about to leave to do the Bad Religion record, Colin said, look, are we doing this or not? Like put up or shut up. I said yes we are and from that point on I decided I was going to do everything I could and focus on doing it. So that's when I started writing. It was really Colin pushing me to do it, but not in a negative way, but it was kind of his whole thing. If Colin hadn't found the label and all this, we probably would not have done it. It wasn't like some master plan. Everything just fell into place and so we did it.

Dischord said it is completely coincidental that their re-issue (with extra tracks) of the first two Dag Nasty records and *Minority of One* are coming out at the same time. How much input did you have on those re-releases?

Well, I was there for the re-mastering. I am the only one who still lives here really. Dave lives in Fredricksburg, but that's kind of like people living in Ojai and someone living in Silver Lake, it's so far away you don't see each other a whole lot. So I was kind of the one guy around, so I went with Ian when they were re-mastering it. As far as choosing the extra tracks on both of these things, basically that was kind of a group effort, but mostly Ian and I trying to collate the tracks and figuring out what extra songs we could find that were out there and put that stuff together. You know, our friend Jason, who wound up doing the *Minority of One* cover as well, has re-done the covers for the re-releases. So, I guess I was the one most involved with it, but it's a coincidence. It was really more a Dischord thing. Ian had the courtesy to let me get involved with it, but they were going to do it anyway. They are in the process of re-mastering virtually everything they have out that is still in print because when they re-mastered the first thing they did, which I think was the first Shudder to Think record, it sounded so amazing that they said they've got to do it for all of them. Dag Nasty was just on the list. There was no master plan at all.

Is there going to be a DVD combo of *Four on the Floor* and *Field Day*?

I don't know anything about that and I don't think that's true. *Field Day* is owned by somebody who isn't us, and I don't know anything about it.

What is it that sets Dag Nasty apart from other non-Minor Threat bands you were in, including Government Issue and Doggy Style?

Doggy Style was a joke and Government Issue was a good D.C. band but didn't really tie together an era or anything. Dag Nasty, when you look back at it in retrospect, it

was one of those first bands who could be a punk band that wasn't playing everything at a 100 miles per hour. Dave is such a really good singer that it was easy to write songs that weren't fast, because he didn't just yell, he could sing too. There were obviously bands like the Descendents who did that and were better than Dag Nasty ever was and are still better as far as I am concerned. They are one of my favorite bands on earth. There just were not a lot of bands like that around. Dag Nasty was pretty original when we came out. We had the pedigree of me being in Minor Threat and being on Dischord. Those two things certainly didn't hurt. That does a lot to sway public opinion, and Dischord has kept the records available in the record stores the entire time since 1985. You've always been able to get these records, and that helps too, because Government Issue stuff goes out of print, then somebody in Germany puts it back out, then it goes away. Dag Nasty has been consistently available and I figure that has a lot to do with why people are still interested in it.

Is there an element of truth to the conversations in fanzines during the mid-to-late 1980s about you having a master plan for Dag Nasty; for instance, you wanted the first record to be the best hardcore record around, then the following record to progress away from that until you made a great pop record?

There's an element of truth that I was aware that when I did *Can I Say* I had to make a really good punk record because, you know, I was keenly aware that being in Minor Threat meant that whatever I did next, people would pay more attention to it than if it was somebody who hadn't been in Minor Threat. I had an opportunity, and if I wanted to continue playing in a band that got to tour, I didn't want to fuck that opportunity up. So, I definitely wanted to do...Well, *Can I Say* came out exactly as I planned it to, but as far as this long range master plan, that's completely untrue. I didn't have anything past that, but I definitely sat down...When I started Dag Nasty, it started with me and a guitar, and I wrote down on a piece of paper that I wanted to do a fast band, I wanted a singer that doesn't yell, I got to find a singer that doesn't yell, and stuff like that. I was purposely trying to do what *Can I Say* became, but there was no long term, past *Can I Say* plan, and certainly when Dave left to go to Israel to go to school, any plans that we had were completely...That would have screwed everything up anyway because when we got Peter, who I think is awesome, but is a completely different kind of singer, we kind of just went on instinct and just did what we felt like. Some of it was good, and some it, sadly, was not.

Looking back, how do you feel now about the track on *Field Day* that pokes fun of the *Can I Say* era, like sampling Dave's line, "Twelve ounces of courage..." and laughing at it within the track. Was it really just good humor, or mocking the posicore aspect of early Dag Nasty?

We were just having fun and we were assholes. I was still a kid, and now when I look at it, it's kind of embarrassing and inappropriate because as an adult I certainly feel differently about the way people choose to live their lives. I think we were smart ass kids and playing around for our own entertainment. We didn't really think in the terms that it was going to be on a record and available for the next 100 years. So, now I just think it's fucking stupid. I wouldn't do anything like that again because I think I am a little more of a grown up.

What do you think about the Shawn Brown demos that are still available from Selfless Records? Is that a viable period of Dag Nasty to you?

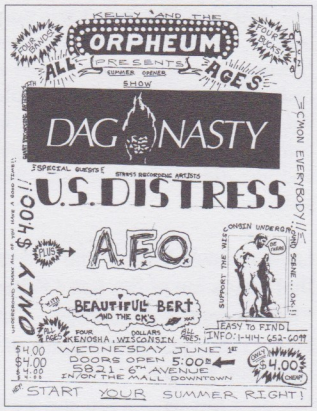
Yes, absolutely, and there's some Shawn stuff that I think is absolutely awesome. Shawn wasn't as good as a singer, but he was fucking awesome performer and the yelling stuff he was great at. I think there's actually some of the faster songs I prefer Shawn's version to. I'm glad the stuff is out there, because it's all part of this whole thing. You take the good with the bad, and you can still buy *Field Day*, which I like half of it...Well, I can't believe that was where I was in my life and I thought that was a good idea. That's something I wish wasn't out there, but it is. The Shawn stuff is stuff I wish was pressed. I wish it was a record, because I think it is great.

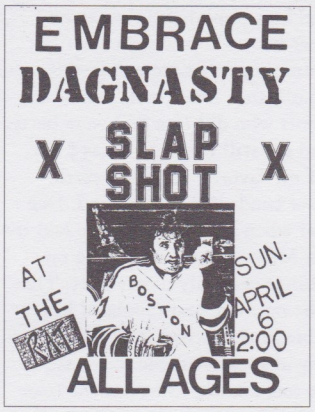
Now that Bad Religion has three guitarists, and let's say the new Dag Nasty record sells tens of thousands of copies, would there be an urge on your part to back away from Bad Religion and put more energy into Dag Nasty?

No. I am not going to tour with Dag Nasty. That's not what it is for. Dag Nasty is a writing outlet for me, because I don't write music for Bad Religion. And it's also something we do because we are friends and it's fun. I've never intended to jump on the reunion tour bandwagon. I don't want to sell a product. What I want to do is make records, and making this record was fun. I am really proud of it, but I don't want to go and try and market it. I am not a good marketer, and I have proven that many times in my life. But I think there's nothing I like more than recording. I haven't written any music in years, and I was just like, what the fuck has happened, I used to write songs. Everyday I would play guitar. I kind of got into this zone with Bad Religion because I wasn't really required to write, so I was just kind of lazy and playing guitar. That's what this Dag Nasty thing is an outlet for. I am not going to go on tour with it or turn it into some sort of empire. I am not interested in that.

It certainly is not my life's goal to make sure that that Make an Effort is in every Tower Records.









How interested are you in keeping your other projects like the Doggy Style and Government Issue stuff in circulation? Would you re-visit those in terms of re-mastering and re-releasing them or playing a one off gig?

Well, I wouldn't do any gigs, and everything I've did, whether bad or good, I think should be out. I mean I would like to. I wouldn't put any personal energy into trying to convince somebody to re-release the Doggy Style record. If someone did, I wouldn't care. It's all posterity. For better or for worse, if I didn't do everything I did before I wouldn't be here right now. So I can just go back and say I don't want to hear that anymore. I would definitely be behind getting all that stuff out, but I certainly wouldn't be going on tour with it. It certainly is not my life's goal to make sure that that Government Issue EP *Make an Effort* is in every Tower Records.

Will this experience with Dag Nasty satiate your needs for a creative outlet for the time being, or urge you to do more things like this?

I don't know if my creative outlet will ever be satiated, I hope not. I would like to continue to do records under the name Dag Nasty because why the hell not, it's my name, I've got two tattoos, I mean, I might as well be in. I already have the fucking ink, I mean, some of them are even blurry! I want to continue to do this, and I've already started writing a couple of things and screwing around for the next Dag Nasty record. Basically, with Revelation, they are like, as long as you want to do this and we don't lose money, just keep doing whatever you want, which is exactly the relationship I want. I said, okay, as long as you don't lose money, I'll keep doing this. That's the plan. I don't know, maybe we'll do one every two years for the next ten years. We'll be the Steely Dan of punk rock.

If this is the best period Bad Religion has found itself in a long time? Where do you see it going from here?

Well, it's very much the same thing. The guitar player in my band owns the record label we're on, so I don't think we can get dropped. What we're going to do is what we've been doing. I've been in the band eight years, and they've been doing it for 21 years, or however long it's been. We are going to keep making records and touring after the records are out until no one wants to see us play and nobody wants to hear the records or they are not any fun to make. It's the same thing. There is no marketing of Bad Religion. It's not necessary. Bad Religion is just what it is. There are people who come to shows that haven't bought a record since *Against the Grain*, but they go to the shows anyway. It's like this weird, for lack of a better term, and I hate this band, but it's this Grateful Dead thing. People dig Graffin, they dig what he's singing about, they like this music. It's astonishing to me how popular Bad Religion is and has been this entire time. I will continue to do it as long as there is a reason and people are into it. I mean, if Gregg doesn't want to write anymore, I am not going to go, let's call it Good Religion and I'll throw some tunes down! It's really Greg and Brett's creative outlet, and it's nice to be in the position where it's also something the people want to see. I'm just going to do it as long as it seems viable. I don't really know. It's kind of tough. When you start a band in 1980, no one thought about what would happen twenty years later, because no one really thought there would be a band in twenty years. When you are fifteen in your mom's basement you never think that you would end up doing an interview in 2002. I don't know what the hell I am going to do.

But what does your mom think of you doing an interview in 2002?

Well, she's jazzed about it now because apparently I have been able to do it and not hit her up for money. Compared to most of her friend's kids, I'm doing pretty well. Initially, she wasn't too into it. She wanted me to go to this place called college, where you are supposed to go and then get jobs and stuff, but I didn't do that. I'm just lucky enough that I have been able not to hit up my parents for money. That's really the whole fucking goal, isn't it?

Is that one of the goals of punk rock? Not just to make music, but create a subculture where you can survive by making such music and doing things the way you want to do them?

I don't necessarily know it that's a tenet of punk rock, because most people can't. I mean, I don't think the goal should ever have been to be self-sustaining by the music, because that's not really very punk, because that means you are trying to create a product that you can live off of. What happened to me is a complete fucking accident.

You are the anomaly?

Totally, I am the minority of one basically, unless you count the guys in Fugazi. You know what I mean. I don't think that has anything to do with it. The whole concept of making money by playing music has never been a motivational factor in any punk music that is any good. I sure know that whenever I tried to write a song to make money, it's been an embarrassing piece of shit. These are lessons you learn as you go through life. There is no way…Well, as soon as you try to point your art in a direction, you're not an artist anymore, you're a marketer.

And there's a distinct difference between the two?

Because art is supposed to be, and I'm using the term art, which I have only become comfortable using these last couple of years because I can't think of a better way of saying it, but what you're doing is expressing yourself and if there's a way other people can dig it, that's great, but you should be doing it whether other people are listening to it or not. If you are doing it in order for other people to buy it, that means you would have not done it otherwise.

So, you would get a job to pay your bills before you would make music to make money?

Of course, I've done that many times. It's not like I have been living off this for an entire 20 years. I've always had a job. It's just I'm lucky that recently I haven't had to have a job when I was off tour. But of course I would. I'm standing at my friend's motorcycle shop right now, and I'd probably just go put on an apron and start taking shit apart.



PIERCING THE DARKEST HOUR

An interview with guitarist Mike Schleibaum

Although Darkest Hour pummel and pound with a vengeance akin to Judas Priest going 70 M.P.H., they have a belly full of slapstick humor, or so it seems. There's no Lucifer or carnage of souls, no bummed out Gothic dark side of the moon, no werewolf saliva and mangled bodies, no fields of slaying demons, just fried-metal rock'n'roll rollicking like a hurricane. They'll jump on each other's backs and form a jittery pyramid on stage or jump an ESPN reporter, it's all the same. Please welcome retro metal lust all wrapped up in Euro-styled Swedish death metal froth. As my friends say, good times are back again.

It seems that during the last couple of years that crossover punk and metal 'zines have disappeared almost, which means you are relegated to heavy metal magazines.

When I first got into hardcore everybody did a 'zine. Everybody was at Kinkos, everybody had their own little 'zine, and that's how I found out about some awesome bands. It was really cool. We've been on tour for almost a year, it will be a year in June, straight, and during the last three years that we have been on tour I haven't seen 'zines. You don't see kids giving out 'zines at shows. So now the bigger, more punk magazines, they kind of like shun themselves of the more corporate of

MAYBE YOU DIDN'T GET THE MEMO, BUT YOU CAN HAVE A GOOD TIME AT A METAL SHOW.

the punk genre, like Revelation and Victory. Except for Epitaph, who has some weird respect that they get for some reason, maybe because they put out bands that a lot of people like. Those labels tried so hard to run themselves like a "real label," that it sort of alienated a lot of the younger DIY, more independent press stuff. With a band like us, our label Victory will push us to the metal mags because it's the only place they know they are going to get some solid press coverage, and it's also the only magazines that are released on a really consistent level all the time. The thing about the time when everybody did a 'zine, you never knew when anybody's 'zine was going to be, because it was just kids doing it. It's really a shame, because we don't consider ourselves a metal band, but I think it's important for us to be in those magazines because there's a lot of things we want to say that those metal bands won't say in those magazines.

Do you feel betrayed at all, because you pretty much grew up a hardcore kid, but the magazines you grew up on like *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* won't cover you?

Well, I mean, I don't know, I never really thought of it that way. The main thing that is frustrating is- here's the dilemma most people fall into- when you are a hardcore band and you start playing metal-influenced hardcore, the tendency is to be like, fuck, we're a metal band, we're playing metal. A lot of hardcore kids take pride in that. It's really weird, but you see it everywhere. Like when we first started doing it, it was like, yeah, it's not really hardcore, because hardcore to us was like 7 Seconds or Youth of Today, and we didn't sound anything like that. It's metal, but what we got to see that a lot of other crossover metal bands don't get to see is that metal is really fucked up. Much more fucked up than hardcore or punk. A lot of people have a lot of opinions about what's wrong in hardcore or punk, or what's wrong in DIY, but seriously, those people have never seen the other side of the spectrum of the underground death metal world. It's totally different, and it's totally the last place we want to be. So, I feel like in a way we're fighting some of the work that we tried to do a few years ago. We always felt like we'd play, and we'd get the Darkest Hour stare, people would be like, what the hell is this? It's not hardcore, it doesn't have moshy breakdowns, and we don't know what it is, so we'll just stare at it. We just fought it and decided we needed to do a metal tour, we need to play with metal bands, those are bands we sound like, and those kids will like it. Well, we'd do those tours and people would be like, whoa, these guys don't have long hair or anything. I'm not really sure what this is, I think I'll just stare at it.

They would even call you a poseur because you didn't wear all black clothes. You'd have sixty metal bands all wearing the same clothes, and they think they're not poseurs, but the band that chooses to rock the boat is…

People would see us set up and go, what the fuck is this band going to sound like? Then we come up, and we do definitely sound different than a lot of American death metal bands. We are very European influenced, and those types of American metal heads hate that type of metal. On top of that the fact that if you just go out there in T-shirts and jeans, and you don't have a backdrop, and you don't have stage lights and don't have a fucking road crew, they're just going to think that you are a poseur. That's the way the metal world works. There are definitely people who think that other people are poseurs in hardcore and punk, but totally on a different level.

But magazines that represent the punk DIY aesthetic don't seem to respect the way you are challenging the norms of metal?

We were actually refused to play at Gilman St., which is really fucked up because not that I have anything against Saves the Day or Hot Rod Circuit, I actually love the guys in that band, but they can roll up to Gilman St. from San Francisco with three fucking buses, one for the tour crew, and two for the bands, and play. And Darkest Hour, who are five guys in the band who have been a band and totally fighting everything that a band that tours all the time fights, can't play a show there because we are on Victory, which doesn't make any fucking sense to me. Honestly, Victory has a bad rep because a lot of people don't like Tony, and they may have good reasons for not liking Tony, I can't defend him on everything you know. A lot of people don't like the bands he's put out, and in all honesty, I don't like 90% of the bands on Victory. But there are bands who have classic records on that label. I love the Deadguy record. I love the Refused record. Being on a record label to us is no longer just like, we want to be on a record label with bands that we think are awesome, or we want to be on a record label with our dudes, we wanted to be able to do the band and go all out and just be able to do the band, and that just meant finding a record label that would do their job well, not picking a record label based on who has the coolest band flavor of the week.

But there was a domino effect, first Equal Vision was interested, then Revelation, then Victory became interested. It seemed like it took a feeding frenzy, a bidding war, to make people pay attention to the band, not the band's actual merits.

That's exactly how it is.

So one label looks at you simply because another label did?

At some point, sure we could have decided to put records ourselves or done whatever, but that's not where we wanted to take the band. I think that we had a key role in getting those other labels interested, we went and we weren't in everybody's face, but once we were in everyone's face and as you've said, that domino effect happens, it works for you too, because now you can say, fuck, these people are interested and you can say, look, you have to offer the band something more than just saying we'll put out your records. You have to have to make it worthwhile for us to come to your label.

You even said, I'm not going to put my life on hold, not have a home or a phone number, and get rid of my cat for someone to sit in an office and not promote my band.

That's how we felt about M.I.A. (the label that was supposed to put out their first record), our label before Victory. I was ready to take off school to do the band full time, we were excited about the band, and it's all we did. Two days after I had an awesome conversation with someone there about the tour we were going to do, they were taking us out to eat and telling us it was over, and that the record was not coming out.

It was a ghost record. You guys were playing show and songs that highlighted a record no one could get, and ended up selling your own promos?

Right. We just felt like…There's not a lot of bands that will do what we've done. It's hard to say that and not sound cocky, or like a dick, but I know a lot of bands that sit around and go, I would love to be on tour, uh, I don't know, I guess we could book it ourselves…We literally decided we wanted to do the band full-time so we got rid of all the bills we had and everywhere we had to live, and we just went on tour forever. That's what we did. A lot of bands will sit around and talk about doing that, but there's not that many people who put up and just go out and see if they can make it happen. I think that's the problem with metal, because a metal band would never think that they should do that, but the problem with punk sometimes is that

punk bands will say they'll do that, but they don't do it. I mean, it's a very scary thing to do, but we can all say that we feel that the adventure of the past year has definitely been worth it, if anything.

Each of you has very different tastes in music. One guys listens to Mogwai, one guy Entombed, one guy Nebula, so do you think these disparate influences create your sound?
There's definitely strength in difference, but it doesn't seem that way when you're all in the van on a eight hour drive and I want to listen to Jackyl, and no one else wants to listen to that.

But you all love Journey, is that right?
If there's ever been a band that makes you feel like you're in the middle of a movie, it's Journey. It's just a good time. I love the song from *Caddyshack*. What's it called? "Anyway You Want It" (chimes in Eric, the drummer). It makes you feel good about yourself, you know what I mean?



But there's something really honest about saying that. I mean, how many hardcore/metal kids would admit that?
My favorite quote from our singer John is one time I think maybe he was drunk and doing an interview, "Do you really think that death metal band members are gothed out depressed people 24 hours a day and sleep like vampires…Then you are just lying to yourself." People aren't like that. People in these bands are not like they are in interviews and magazines. We've been on tour with some of the most dark death metal bands, and dude, they like to bowl, you know? They like to play Simpson's Clue. They are just like dudes.

There's no need to put on such a mask for you guys?
There's a revolution in different things. There's revolution in sound, there's bands that are very unique sonically, but I think what we bring unique wise is definitely an attitude that hasn't been brought to metal in awhile. I respect Anthrax for being one of the biggest metal bands ever to have a sense of humor, because in a type of music that prides itself on being dark and depressed and just heavy, it's hard to say it's okay, maybe you didn't get the memo, but you can have a good time at a metal show.

You've said that Brian McTernan, the producer on *So Sedated so Secure*, was almost 95% responsible for the sound. Is he like an extra member of the band, like Henry Rollin's old sound guy?
Yeah, I wish we had a live sound guy. Brian is definitely a sixth member in the studio, there's no doubt about it. He adds ideas and tells us things that most other people would not tell us.

Can you give a concrete example of how he approaches it?
Brian is the type of guy, well, he just has this unique talent. You go and play the song and go in and listen back to it, and he can tell you what about the song doesn't make it complete. The other thing is, Brian is not afraid, he's one of the few people we've worked with musically to be like, dude, that part sucks. People, when you go in to record, they're the engineer, or they're the producer and they want to take it in their own direction. I mean, I always felt that Brian's biggest goal was to just to try and get us to come to an agreement on something. He's like a great mediator, instead of trying to direct the band in one direction, he was trying to direct the band in the direction the band wanted to go. The only problem is that the five of us have five different ideas of where the hell we wanted to go. Brian had to be the big rodeo ring master and bring everybody together, well, you want big roomy drum sounds, but you're playing a fucking fast beat and you can't tell what the hell you are playing. That's not going to work. And you want a guitar sound that sounds like something off of *Too Fast for Love*, but that's not going to work.

Do you bring record into the studio and say, I want to sound like this?
Never. The thing is, that's when bands get in the biggest pitfalls. It's the worst thing you can do as a band, to say, we want to sound like this band. How are you ever going to bring what you are going to add new musically to anything if you've come with that attitude. We're always trying to figure out how in the fuck are we not going to sound like every other Swedish heavy metal band, even though that's what we like. There's a reason metal drum sounds are clicky, there's a reason why most metal guitar solos are one way, because the style of the music lends itself to that. You need to be able to hear what the fuck the drummer is playing, and if it's like Led Zeppelin sounding drums, it's going to be real hard because it's going to be all washed. The thing is, you have to figure out how you are going to work within the genre of music to do something new and add to it, which is hard. I don't think we are nearly where we should be yet. I think the new record was a step we took in a direction that we felt we were going, but when you listen to that record, that's not Darkest Hour's guitar sound, that's not the drum sound. When I listen to an AC/DC record, that's Angus Young playing guitar, you know.

You dropped some song ideas that didn't work on the new record. What was it about them that didn't work?
The thing is, there's two ways you can go with the Swedish death metal thing in our opinion. The Entombed way is very rock, *Wolverine Blues*, and even on one of the newer records there's death rock, almost cock rock in one sense, death metal in another, with raw guitars, roomy drums. The other end is In Flames, very technical, everything in thirds throughout the entire record. The guitar sounds clean, the drums are crisp, and it's a very tight clean record. Half of the time we were like, we want this fucking riff, this is awesome, then the other time we would be like, we want a death rock riff, then the other time we said we should have a crazy almost guitar solo here. I think trying to focus on the songwriting so that the record had a continuing meaning was really hard for us, because we decided the rockier, groovier stuff is not where we're going. The songs like the first song on the record, or track five, which is faster, more traditional European sounding metal stuff, is more the direction the next record will be.

You've also said the new record was more band-oriented, does that mean the songwriting happened more equally among yourselves?
Well, Ryan (our drummer) and I actually talked about this the other day in the van. We actually felt we didn't like the way we wrote *Judas*, so we tried something different and wrote *So Sedated…* and then we were like, fuck, we wrote more creative stuff when we wrote the other way. When we wrote this record, we had set days. We'd go, and sometimes I wouldn't have a riff, I wouldn't have anything, we'd just go and write a song. With *Judas*, we wouldn't write a song until someone came in and said, hey I've got all these parts. Since the songwriting happened over a longer span of time, the songs sounded different. Because we tend to write songs that sound the same when we write them together at the same time. It's like whatever you're

I WAS THE DUDE AT THE FUGAZI SHOW WITH THE L.A. GUNS T-SHIRT ON.

into at the time you like regurgitate over and over again. We wrote all these songs over a span of two months all the time the exact same way, and I feel that maybe they suffer creatively a little bit, but sometimes we tend to think about shit too much. There's that aspect of it too. Maybe some of these songs are better because we didn't try to figure out how we were going to add more harmonies or more drum fills or whatever.

How long can you make music without guitar solos *(everyone yells and laughs)*?
The thing is dude you can do that forever. The thing is, there is so many more things you can add to a song. In my opinion, guitar solos sound like shit always. They never add. It would confuse me when I would listen to a record, I would be like, what the fuck is happening in the song right now? It's like all of a sudden, the song goes away, and this dude jumps out and decides he's at Guitar Center or something, and the energy just goes down. I'm not going to say that we'll never have such a guitar part, but solo in a sense that it is a guitar solo, and nothing else is happening, and it's fucking straight on, sounds like it's the *Reign in Blood* record, it's not going to happen, because it's not us. We write songs, and guitar solos do not add to songs. Most people put them in metal songs because they think you need to have them. I mean metal is a genre of music, and punk for that matter, where people do things because people think that's what you have to do when you write a metal song or hardcore song.

What do you grow up listening to?
Everybody in the band grew up listening to different things. Like Ryan listens to some serious underground death metal shit, which I can't even stomach now. I just can't even get how it works. I can't get the song structure. I'm like, what the fuck. Then I, as embarrassing as it is, I listen to a lot of the 1980s glam stuff and I like it. I'm not really embarrassed to say that I really like every Motley Crue record, or every Bon Jovi, or every Judas Priest record. I like those songs.

His girlfriend interjects:
When I first met Mike, he looked at me one day totally serious, and said, I have bad taste in music, does that bother you?

The thing is, I appreciate death metal, and I love bands like Anthrax, old Metallica, and thrash. I like that type of metal. But what I really appreciated about a lot of the glam stuff is they have song structures, they have choruses, they have verses, like I know what the fuck is happening. A lot of the American death metal that Ryan was into in the early 1990s doesn't flow like a song to me in a circular manner and it doesn't make any sense to me. Growing up wise, I listened to a lot of the glam stuff, a lot of just rock, and then, your signature 1980s metal.

But you lived in the D.C. area. Did you see bands like Swiz or Fugazi?
I think I was a little too young to see bands like Swiz. But bands I did see, there was a band called Damnation A.D. who were fucking awesome. They were a hardcore band. When they came out, they played some brutal ass shit, fucking heavy, and it was like metal man. They didn't fuck around. They played a show in a hall with no PA, they played a show at a fucking garage, but every time they played it was fucking serious. They didn't play at some club down the street where they had to sell tickets like every other metal band. We would go see Fugazi play every year for free in the park. That scene was around, and I feel it really influenced our attitude about things like putting out your own records, making your own flyers, and doing your own shows. D.C. was an environment where you could do all those things very easily, but musically it didn't have that much of an impact on me, like I was dude at the Fugazi show with the L.A. Guns T-shirt on.

They might even have appreciated the fact, considering that kids were probably walking around with Fugazi T-shirts.
And they don't make them, so how the fuck does that happen, you know? I get psyched, even when it's lame, when I see a kid at a punk show or DIY show with a Linkin Park shirt or Slipknot shirt, because as much as I hate what those bands stand for, at least that kid is experiencing a different side of music. The biggest example is you go into a Guitar Center or Mars, and these dudes working at these places want so bad to be in a band and play music, but no one ever told them, bro, do a show in your basement and tell people to come over and charge them $3.00 and pass out flyers. I tell a kid, we've been on tour for 6 months now, and he's like, whoa, do you have a Ferrari? They don't understand, you just get out there and you do it. I think that such a D.C. ethic, which we really didn't pay to much attention to at first, is really one of the things I learned about music when growing up. It saved me. I could have been that guy with the Pantera shirt on, trying to figure how I could sell fifty tickets so my band could open for Flotsam and Jetsam on their reunion tour. Luckily, I got saved, and got to experience punk music too.

You've also said the your genre is the easiest genre to write crappy music in, "I can get my little brother a guitar, teach him some power chords and he can come up with a metal core record."
My brother is 13 now and he has a guitar and he *does* come up with crappy metal core songs.

Well, how do you not write crappy music with the genre?
Well, we do know that we care about the music that we create, and we put a lot of effort into it, and put a lot of effort into not being what we feel is generic. I don't know, because in someone's opinion, it could be crappy. The whole point I was trying to make is it's so easy to get out there and do what everyone else is doing and get a mediocre reaction, and never make any waves, and never get heckled, but never really do anything. It's easier to go out there in all black with tattoos and long hair and be accepted as a metal band, but it's hard to go out and say, fuck that shit, because it's about playing some thrash, not about who has got the coolest stocking arm covers or something. That's the thing. It comes back to us every time, that music is about image 90% of the time to 90% of the people. It just really shouldn't be.

Your ex-bass player used to play in the Minutemen-like band, Shoutbus?
Shoutbus is an awesome band. I felt that Bill in a lot of ways felt that he couldn't fully express himself because you know, in a metal band, a bass player, unfortunately, well, Iron Maiden is a good example. There's a band that said, you know what, fuck, we're going to write good metal songs and make the bass in the mix so you can hear it. Most metal bands...For instance, on *And Justice For All*, I don't know anybody who can answer whether there's for sure a bass on the record or not. Who the hell knows. I want to ask one of those dudes. All I want to say is that I think Bill felt a little bit stifled musically, but it's because when you try and write songs and not have guitar solos, or do whatever, or try and write in a team way...Well, it's like you can't always play a guitar solo, you can't always play a drum solo, and when you play bass in a metal band sometimes you've got to take the back seat and play the root notes of the chord progression. That was really hard for him, and I appreciate that it was hard for him, and it's hard for our new bass player. It's hard to be a bass player in a metal band and do something creative, because it's a genre of music that doesn't take the instrument very seriously.

What's the worst part of the Gothenberg Swedish metal sound?
I think when people add clean vocals. We can't stand clean vocals in heavy music. But that's just our opinion.

Many metal oriented people point to your vocalist as being your weak link.
Dude, they don't get it. We got out and just thrash, that's what we want to do, just shred. We want to be an extreme band where everyone goes crazy. We are not about...Well, I don't enjoy dynamics in songs that include a vocal breakdown, you know what I mean, like rapping, or singing. People think it sounds monotonous, but if you listen to the At the Gates record, that shit is classic, and it sounds bad ass, and that dude is doing nothing but screaming his ass off for the entire record. That's just our opinion about what how we want our music to sound. I don't think that singing is bad, because I like Vince Neil, but I don't someone that sounds like Vince Neil should be singing in a band that sounds like *Beneath the Remains* era of Sepultura. That doesn't sound good to us.





You believe that even with the collapse of MIA, who was supposed to put out your first record, it taught you that after that, you could survive anything.
I was telling Mike, our other guitar player, today that you know, sometimes...Well, Mike was saying to me. You know, I find that the best shows are the ones that have the most strife before we play, the most hectic before we get there. Sometimes bands have it too easy, and they don't realize what they have and argue about shit that is not important. We've been lucky to have been shit on enough, we know what is important to make a band work and what is not. I'm not saying that the band is never going to break up, but I feel like we became a much stronger unit after that. When you go out on tour and everybody is heckling you, like we did the Metalennium tour and people hated us, because we went out there and joked around and came out to the *Knightrider* theme song...Whatever. They just didn't know what the hell was happening. When people are heckling you and challenging what you are doing and what you believe in, it makes you stronger as a unit. You don't argue about things like, oh shit, how much should we sell the T-shirts for, or shit, should we have a saw on the front of the next T-shirt or should we have an alien. You are too busy fighting everybody else to fight yourself.

Victory got you an ESPN interview during an extreme sports show, and you kind of mocked the interviewer by saying, "We like extreme walking," and later tackled the guy?"
I think ESPN did a thing for Snapcase and Boy Sets Fire. I don't think they had any idea of what they were getting into. They just were like, Victory got a new band and they are on tour a lot, so let's go out and video tape them. So they came to a show where there were twenty people with a huge ass camera crew. There's nobody there, and they want to ask us all these questions, and we just didn't take it seriously because we didn't think it was a big deal. Little did we know it was going to be all over national TV all the time and everybody we knew, including people we went to high school with, were going to see it, and my parents. They were asking us serious questions and we're just not serious. We don't give a shit about sports, you know what I mean? We're metal heads. Metal heads don't play sports. That's not true, sometimes they watch football *(laughs)*. I'm being sarcastic but it's just funny, a TV program that shows videos of extreme music with extreme skating, it's just like bubble gum. It's not of any substance to the bands. It doesn't mean anything about...It's not presenting the band the way we want it to be presented. We didn't take it seriously.

How did Victory respond? Were they cool about it?
You know, Victory doesn't like the fact that John wears glasses in pictures, they think he looks like a dork, but as much shit as we cause them when we talk shit about metal in every metal magazine there is, going out there and looking like jackasses in an industry where images sell 90% of the records, they have been very supportive and behind the band. When we told Tony, look dude, John needs the glasses to see, he has to wear them, he backs off. I appreciate what he's saying when he says, this is what sells records, but the thing is, we don't give a shit.

You don't want to jump through those hoops to sell the records. I thought Victory were supposed to be punk kind of guys, not label executives?
But they also run a business. I know that is not punk to say, but it is punk that Tony never went to college, started a record label, and now he fucking runs it. That's punk in itself, whether you want to admit it or not. He wants to sell records, and that's how you sell records to metal heads. We think that it's more important to maybe open people's minds sometimes than sell them a record.

In some ways then, the video with ESPN was more subversive than your album?
In some ways that's true because we went out there and were like fuck it, and people we were like, I thought that was great. That was awesome. Because if you ever watch the other bands on X Tracks, they're like, here's a video from Baby Ghopal, we started in 1995, and...Like it's their big opportunity to showcase their band to a new audience so they are going to do their best to capitalize on it.
We were just like fuck it, this is the way we are, this is how it's going to be, like it or not.

One of the things that really separates you from most metal crossover bands is the lyrics, like the song "Media Salvation" with

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE EMBARRASSED TO SAY, "I PLAY IN A METAL BAND."



the line, "We need another God on the TV screen." It's not death, dying, and decay, there's a certain level of socio-political awareness that reminds me of Corrosion of Conformity a bit, but I certainly don't mean you are yapping like Jello Biafra.

The thing is when we started the band we wanted the mood of the band to be dark, we wanted the lyrics to be dark, but there's only so many times you can write a lyric about a relationship that sucks, or how much you don't like religion, or whatever. We are not a band that writes about eating your grandmother for breakfast. So, the song you quoted about TV is actually about Charlton Heston, even though a lot of metal heads would probably agree with what he has to say. We're in a position where we find ourselves a lot of times on the wrong side of the playing field when it comes to what most metal heads believe about the world or about politics. A pretty good example is on the Metalennium tour, the Sept. 11th attacks happened. The band was really quick to get out on the mic. Well, wait, we did the tour right after the Sept. 11th attack, but every band was quick to get on the mic and say fuck Afghanistan, let's fucking bomb them, you know what I mean? Right away, that was the Middle America response.

The Ted Nugent response.

Yeah. I mean, we definitely think that was a horrible thing that happened, but also don't trust the American government a 100% and that idea to the American loving southern metal head, well, not just southern metal heads, because most of them are like that, but the point I'm trying to make is that they are usually on the right end of the spectrum, but we are on the left because we come from a different background. Like we come from the punk hardcore background, which is different than what a metal head comes from, and that's why the lyrics are different, because you have different views that are adding to songwriting process. That's another part of the chain we are trying to add, we are trying to add to the metal genre, like it's okay, you can still have a brain and still play metal. You don't have to be embarrassed to say, I play in a metal band, because most bands are thinking about ripping you apart with a chainsaw.

How exactly did you grow up? How supportive were your families?

My mom was a Catholic nun for ten years actually. She definitely does not like the band or understand what the fuck is happening. She would throw away my old Ozzy stuff, she thinks it's devil worshipping and satanic. She says she feels like a failure because I'm not Catholic and I don't play God's music, but you know, I think she just doesn't understand it fully. She did say that there was an interview with Billy Joel she was watching…But before I start, I have to say, my mom isn't very supportive, she doesn't like the band, I graduated from college and she would much rather have me have a normal job. My dad is definitely very supportive and kept my mom in check, so that's sort of how I managed to survive my entire life with her. But my mom was watching a thing with Billy Joel, a person stood up in the audience and said, you know, I'm really try to make it with my music career right now, what's a really good job I can have while I try to do that? Billy Joel said, you know what, if you think you should have another job, then maybe music is not the career for you. So, my mom kind of believes that it's okay that I dropped everything, that I don't have a job and am broke and I am just trying to do what I've got to do to make things happen for the band, because Billy Joe said it was cool. But you know, where my parents weren't supportive, John, our singer's mother did a lot to help the band when we were younger. She put the band's insurance in her name, gave us money, a place to practice, let us park the van in front of her house, let us take over her house constantly. She was very supportive. Our drummer parent's had Darkest Hour over for dinner once, had a dinner party for us, loves the band, and think it's great. Everybody in the band has different backgrounds. Unfortunately, I have the cliché religious parent who didn't like the band's background, but she still loves me and wants what's best for me and I still care about her, it's just that we don't see eye to eye on life right now. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact she never experienced what it was like to be a teenager. She went right into the convent, so I am living my life right now in an age she never really saw.

What would you prefer, be broke and play to small crowds, and maybe finally break up, or get pushed to the max and end up playing to people you don't like much?

I don't think we would ever play in front of people that we don't like much.

Like the Strokes who played a pool hall room one day then sell out 3,000 seats a few months later, but end up mocking those 3,000 people.

Well, breaking up would be worse, because the Strokes, sure they play big venues now, or Slayer can play big venues now, but you know what, they can still book shows at smaller places and play three shows in a row if they wanted to.

Is that what you would do?

I don't know, because I'm not in the position to say, but I do know that if we ever got to that point, for me it would be a fucking musical revolution because I just don't see how five regular dudes in shitty jeans and shitty T-shirts who have nothing that is marketable in the main music world could make something that is marketable enough…

But I'm sure the Ramones and Nirvana all said that.

That's probably true, but that's just how it goes. If that happened, I would hope that at least we would act differently and do things differently at least, but I don't know what that would be because I've never been in the that position. All I know is what I know now, which is fighting to get a show at a club, or fighting to get to the next show and making sure I have enough money so that when I go home I don't have to get a shitty job for a few weeks before I leave again, you know what I mean? So maybe for right now, that's what keeps us real, and maybe we won't be a real band if we reach that other aspect, that other point you talked about. It's just like bands that say, we'll never sell out, we'd rather break up than sell out, but we don't know what selling out is for us. We've always been ourselves I think.

You've been acting out of survival rather than profit motives.

Tours are it for us. We just want to be in a band and play music and play shows. That's how we do it, by just trying to figure out to survive on tour.

Is the emphasis of the next record going to be, this is what we want to do, this is what we want to try, or will it be more like, this is what we don't want to do, so let's avoid sounding a certain way?

My plan for the next record is; First, I want to do it in Sweden, and I want it to be produced by a real Swedish metal head.

You weren't happy with the last record?

I love Brian, but I would never drag Brian into the situation where he would have to put up with us again. Because Brian is one of my really good friends, and he cares about all of us, but Brian does not like death metal, and he does not like producing that type of music. It's not what he likes, and he only finds happiness in knowing that his



friends are happy with the recording, and you know, that makes me happy, but makes me, well, I'm sure Brian would understand, that we need a person who understands the music that we play and Brian's misunderstanding was his edge for a long time, and I feel that we understand the edge that Brian had, but we'd like to try something a little bit different. We'd like to go to Sweden with a fucking dude who has done all the records that we love, and we can add to that sound with Darkest Hour. We want to do it in Sweden, and we want to have all the songs written before we go there, everything. We don't want to try and figure the shit out in the studio, we just want to go in and record them, and instead of trying to figure out what drum sound is good, or what guitar sound is good or what sound is clear, we want it to sound how we sound live, because that's the biggest mistake we've made in the past I think. We don't ever say fuck, put a tape recorder in the room, that's what sounds good, that's what the band sounds like when we have band practice.

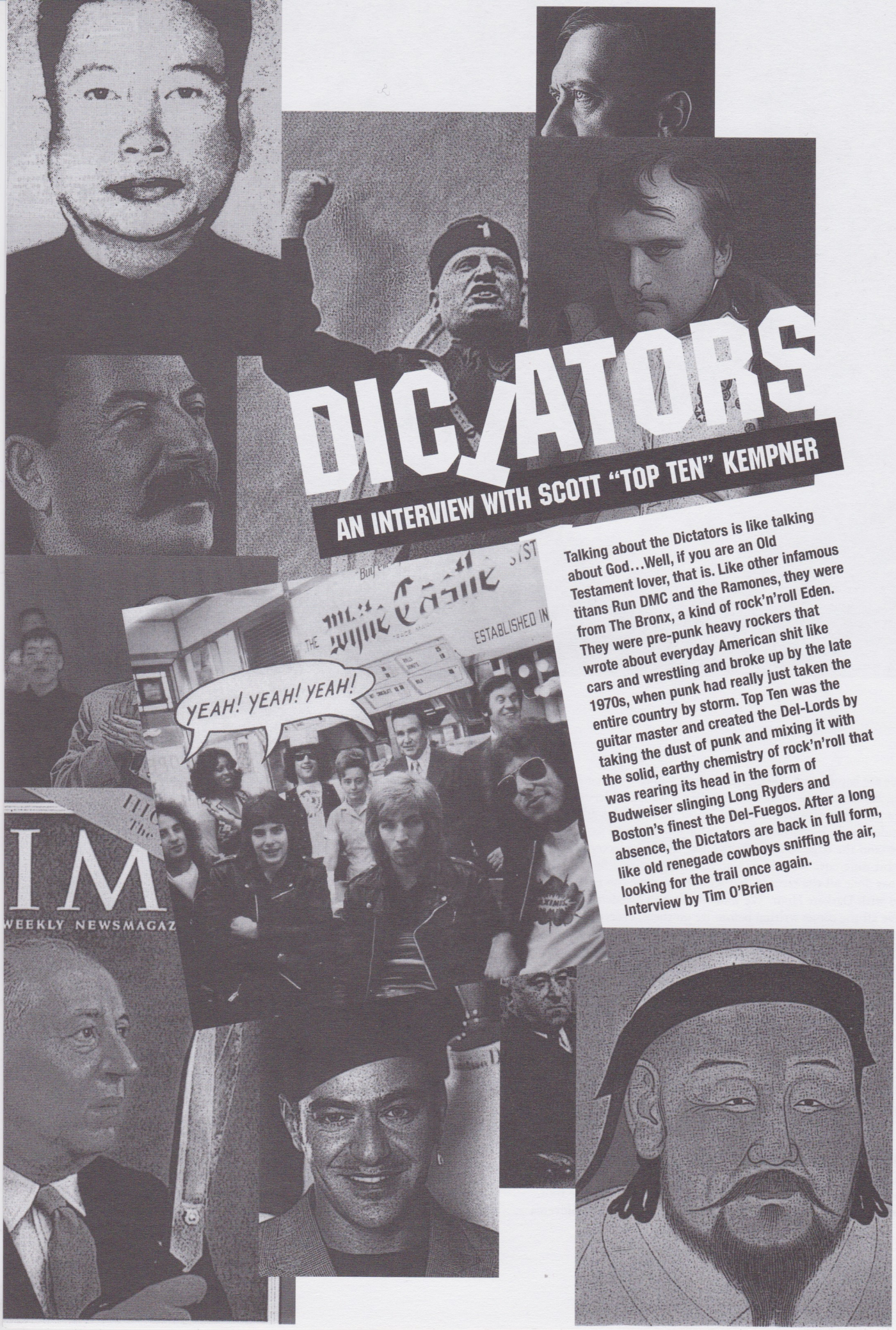
Like live to 2-track?
Well, we're never going to do that, because we suck more than that, but yeah, we want it to sound like when we play live. But it's really hard to do that when you play death metal, because it's really technical.

Have you guys played Europe?
Yeah, we did a European tour. It was cool, but we didn't do a European metal tour, we did a European punk and hardcore tour. We went to Germany, Italy, Ireland, Spain, Hungary, and Slovenia…

Is there a noticeable difference between Eastern Europe and Ireland?
They all look the same, because they all wear the same T-shirts. We did a tour with a Hungarian band, and you know what, they all liked the same bands we do. Like dude, you like the *Firestorm* record too! It's just punk, that's just how it is worldwide.

Is the lack of difference disappointing though?
Well, the main depressing thing about Europe is that they don't give a fuck about European bands. In America, if a European punk or hardcore band came over, no one would pay attention to them, but if a European death metal band or the International Noise Conspiracy comes over, you know, a different genre of music, they are like gods. Well, in Europe if you are the opening hardcore band from the German town nobody gives a shit about you. If you're not from America, they don't care. It's imperialism everywhere, and that is a shame, that is really depressing. Every time we play we say, support your European bands. If you play in front of the local hero hometown European hardcore band, you know what, people don't care just because they are not American. In America, if you play with the local hometown heroes, you want to play before them because everyone is going to leave.

But when are you going to get to South America?
We want to get to South America, but it's hard to get a tour booked there. We thought about it, but our record is not widely available there. It's sort of hard to do a tour where your record is not available. We are really working on an Icelandic tour, and that is something that is weird that not a lot of bands do.



DICTATORS

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT "TOP TEN" KEMPNER

Talking about the Dictators is like talking about God…Well, if you are an Old Testament lover, that is. Like other infamous titans Run DMC and the Ramones, they were from The Bronx, a kind of rock'n'roll Eden. They were pre-punk heavy rockers that wrote about everyday American shit like cars and wrestling and broke up by the late 1970s, when punk had really just taken the entire country by storm. Top Ten was the guitar master and created the Del-Lords by taking the dust of punk and mixing it with the solid, earthy chemistry of rock'n'roll that was rearing its head in the form of Budweiser slinging Long Ryders and Boston's finest the Del-Fuegos. After a long absence, the Dictators are back in full form, like old renegade cowboys sniffing the air, looking for the trail once again.

Interview by Tim O'Brien

Let's start at the beginning of your musical career with the Dictators. You once told me that the Dictators got signed to a major label without ever playing a gig, go into that.

The way the band started, Andy (Shernoff) was a year older, he was already in college, I was still in high school and one of my best friends from the neighborhood went up to the same college, State College of New Paltz in New Paltz, New York. And he met Andy and I was introduced to Andy as Rock'n'Roll Andy. I'm still in my senior year of high school, Andy's in his freshman year of college. And they tell me about this guitar player who was actually from the Bronx, but who had moved up there with his parents and was playing in a band called Total Crudd. And that turned out to be Ross ("The Boss" Funichello) and the band was actually led by a guy named Parker Valentino Gambino, yes of those Gambinos. And I think the story went that he was kind of the black sheep of the family and what they did was buy him this house aptly named the Out-of-it House in between New Paulz and Poughkeepsie called Highland and that was were the band lived and the band rehearsed. And Ross was in that band. Andy and my buddy Robert who introduced me to Andy just would always say that the band was kind of useless and crappy and horrible and they had good taste in covers and stuff like that but the guitar player was amazing. And this led to Andy and I, since obviously because we've been together all this time, to become kindred spirits. And Andy and Robert, very surreptitiously whispering into Ross' ear, "you really gotta get outta this band and do something else, I know this guy Scott from New York, and he plays guitar and is into the same type of music you know the MC5 and the Who, and the Stooges and the Velvet Underground and the Rolling Stones and the Beatles." From there I started kinda getting the inkling, I mean I really couldn't play at all. I mean really I could barely play, I could play stuff but I didn't have any kind of knowledge of music, I had no theory training. I was only learning like what someone could show me. But I couldn't connect the dots, I had no idea why. I could play "Gloria" but I didn't really know what I was doing. Kind of like reading phonetically. This lead to me starting to go up there on weekends. Kinda just get together with them and jam. Ross was still in the band I got to see called Total Crudd. The first song I ever heard them play was *"I gotta line on you"* by Spirit and Ross was amazing. The rest of the band held no interest for me whatsoever. But, as time went on, as months went by, you know I was the guy going to the Bronx High School of Science, I was being geared toward an academic life. I was a Jewish middle class kid. My parents had aspirations that at the very least, lawyer, teacher, rocket scientist, whatever you know, and in my heart of hearts, ever since February of '64 when I saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan and that's all I really wanted to do but didn't really know it. When I really figured that out was the first time I saw that Who, and that was the band that put a guitar in my hand and made me realize or made me really take seriously the idea of doing it myself. But it was a back burner kind of dream, the front burner was still high school and then on to college. You know at the Bronx High School of Science the ratio of students that went on to college was like 99.9 percent. I think it was the class before me that had the first two graduating students ever that didn't go on to college. I started going up there on weekends, it was still hard to break the chain. As a side story, there was this girl named Karen and she was the dream of every guy in the neighborhood. She was just this gorgeous girl and as luck would have it, I met her. I finally met her in the summer of '71, and lo and behold she's going up to New Paltz to start college in September so finally its like OK I'm comin' up, they wanted me to come up and start this band and I was hemming and hawing and like I don't know if I could do this and then when I met Karen, I was like OK you got it. And she ended up becoming a *Playboy* centerfold so we're really talking a beauty. In fact, the very first night I was in a rock band, in February of '72 or January of '72 may it was '73 I guess it was '73, I was like 19 years old and the first night and Ross had found this house and literally in the middle of nowhere, we were a mile from a road, and the first night in the house I slept with Karen. It's like you know OK I'm in a rock-'n'roll band and I'm sleeping with a *Playboy* centerfold. And what I brought along with me was a friendship I started up in the summer of '70 the first time I saw a rock band, the Stooges, with rock writer Richard Meltzer, you know Meltzer?

Yes.

Well, I met Richard at a club called Unganos. It was the summer *Funhouse* eventually came out. I was completely thrilled to meet him. He was a rock writer, and they don't get many people thrilled to meet them, you know, especially back then. And at the end of the show I went up to him and asked him if he was gonna write about the Stooges, and he said no, I'm gonna write about you. And that started up a friendship that along with Richard, came along his old high school pal, Sandy Pearlman. And already at this point Pearlman was writing lyrics for and managing the Blue Oyster Cult. So here we go here's all these elements, we have this house in the middle of nowhere, all we can do is rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Andy is writing songs. In fact *"Two Tub Man"* is the first song Andy ever wrote. We had songs about Superman episodes and this chick Carol Wayne who used to be the teatime movie lady on the Johnny Carson show. Pretty much the sensibilities that went into the first record, you know late night TV, White Castle, Twilight Zone, and professional wrestling and rock and roll. And you put all these things in a blender and after four months of rehearsing we got Richard Meltzer to get Sandy Pearlman to come up and see the band. And we didn't even have a name. Andy had a fanzine called the *Teenage Wasteland Gazette*, which was just complete untruths about everything and anything. Really like the Richard Meltzer sensibility, everything was made up. And one of the articles he had was a fake rock festival and one of the bands that played was the Dictators. And when Sandy came up, and he stood in our front room where we had our little rock gear set up and he loved it and he's like what's the name of the band and it's like uh, the Dictators and obviously it stuck. Sandy's partner was Richard Krugman. They managed the Blue Oyster Cult. He was an A&R guy at CBS, I guess Epic or maybe it was Columbia, I don't even remember, back then they were sister labels. He was able to authorize demo time for the band. We'd never played in front of anybody except the local lunatics and LSD fanatics that we knew from up there. Those were the only people who had ever seen the band play. So we take a trip down to New York, and we get studio time at the old Columbia studios, which was a church on 30th street. We make this demo that Epic was paying for, so that gives them the first right of refusal. They picked it up, we had a record deal. And we still had yet to play anywhere. And that's literally how it started. I mean it seemed like the greatest thing in the whole world at that point, like wow we had a record deal, the problem was is that we were shit. We didn't really necessarily know that, we were soon to find that out. The first gig we ever played, and the first time I personally ever played guitar in front of people that I didn't know by their first names, was in front of 7,000 people at Prince George County Community college in Maryland opening for the Blue Oyster Cult and the Stooges. That was the very first time I ever played my guitar in front of people. And that was how it started. So we did everything completely backwards. And, of course, then you know there's no CBGB's, there's no punk rock, there's no Ramones, there's no Patti Smith. There's no anything like what we were doing. If you play in a rock band the only places you played was like colleges, theaters, even arenas and stuff were pretty brand new. It was just a few years before that the Rolling Stones, Cream and Blind Faith could play a Madison Square Garden type place. The only thing to do was to get on that circuit and we were not anywhere near ready to play in that kind of arena. Shows never really went well, they didn't always go particularly badly, I mean but people were basically scratching their heads and even Manitoba, even Richard wasn't in the band at that point. Andy was the lead singer, Ross and I played guitar and Stu Boy who was already at this point the third drummer we had and that was the band. And there we were out there trying to play in front of I mean this was the beginning of...I mean the first time around for the Dictators, it was pretty much opening for any band that was out there playing. And we ended up opening

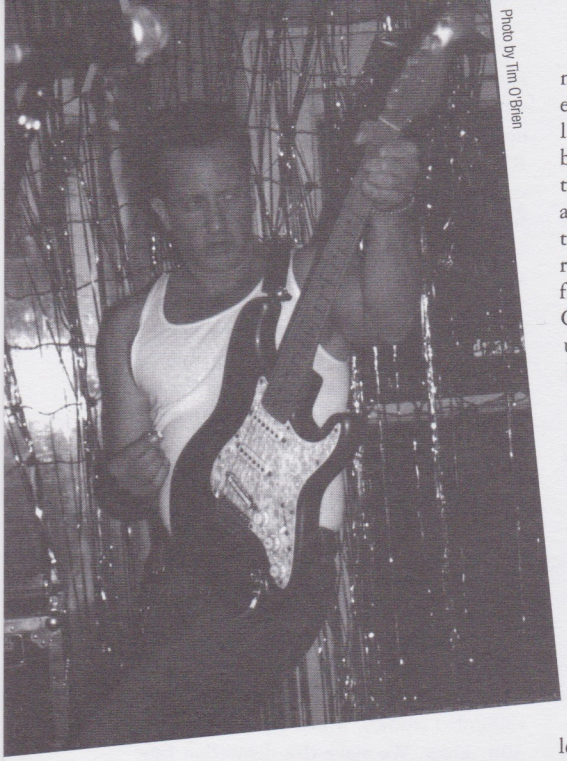


Photo by Tim O'Brien

up for anybody from AC/DC and Cheap Trick to Kiss and Bob Seger to REO Speedwagon, Rush on our first road trip, Nazareth. I mean you name it, you go through the '70s catalog and, we basically opened for every one of them.

And in these days the amplification in arenas wasn't that good and there was no real punk rock history of not knowing how to play your instruments.

The word punk rock, no one was using the word punk rock. You know at that point punk rock was the thing Lenny (Kaye) put together for the Nuggets record. That's what punk rock was. Punk rock was the Count Five, the Music Machine, and the Seeds and ? Mark and the Mysterians, and that was punk rock. As far as being reinvented the way it became reinvented, it was like a lifetime later it seemed to us.

So these guys are polished arena rock acts and you guys are up there flailing away, you have a catalog of what 15 songs or something and you're doing 45 minute sets?

Something like that, that sounds about right. When we made that album, we thought that we were speaking in this long lost language of the American teenager, we thought that every American teenager was gonna drop the music they were listening to and rally with us, you know? We thought that just everybody was into White Castle and surf music and the Who and they were into watching the *Twilight Zone* and the Abbot and Costello TV show and professional wrestling and this was the sensibility that was universal. And we found out very quickly otherwise.

So then eventually the sales didn't come and what led to…

Well we got dropped pretty quickly. I think the record sold 7,000 copies, which is still not considered good and it was considered even less than good back then. So that was like a year or so but it seemed interminable, but of course when you're younger, so everything is relative, a year to a twenty year old is a lot longer than a year to a forty year old. In the interim, our friend Helen Wheels, God rest her soul, needed a band, she was the girlfriend at that point of Albert of the Blue Oyster Cult. She was this leather seamstress um, songwriter, wannabe singer and needed a band, and since we were out of work and since we were still being managed by those guys, they thought we should be her band. Somewhere in this period, Andy decided he wanted to be Brian Wilson and didn't want to play anymore, just wanted to produce and write. It was such a vague little tiny episode that I don't even really remember, that was the point that we got Mark ("The Animal" Mendoza) in the band and we also got Richard Teeter. So all of a sudden now we have like a real rhythm section, I mean Ritchie was a real musician Mark was awesome. Mark was like the equivalent of Ross really in his own way. And Ross was like, even in the beginning Ross was amazing. When I met Ross, he was amazing. Maybe he was just born amazing. He was the only credibility we had in doing what we did. We had no other right to think we could do what we did, I mean everything rests around Ross. But you know. I mean I was getting a little better at it and with Mark and Ritchie in the band by this point Manitoba is in the band and he's not convincing anybody that he's like Rod Stewart or Robert Plant out there or anything but with those guys in the band we had somewhat of a better shot at things. And that was what the band was, I mean Mark actually came into the band to be in Helen's band. And then everything sorta started coming back together. We decided to play a show, Andy wanted back in, but the only room for him was on keyboards because Mark had taken over the bass. For the second record and for pretty much the touring life of the band until '77 that was the lineup, with Richard singing most of the songs but not all of the songs, and Mark and Ritchie, and me and Ross on guitar and that was the band that made *Manifest Destiny*.

By the time *Fuck 'em if They Can't Take a Joke* (ROIR reissued 1998 as *New York, New York*) came out in '81, at that point you had started doing some reunion gigs around the city?

Yeah, I think not many but some. We had started playing some shows. I mean we were all best friends, so it was really in a way it was impossible to break up. I mean we all really wanted to play music and we were all best friends and we really didn't know anybody else. So it just kept falling back together, as I guess history would show that it was meant to be. There was something about it I mean some bands fall apart, we just kept falling together. So yeah *Fuck 'em* was about '80, '81, in the early days of what we were calling reunion shows.

So let's talk about Helen Wheels some more. I read that on a tribute record (*To Helen With Love: A Tribute to the Life and Music of Helen Wheels*, Cellsum, 2001) you played a solo acoustic version of Dylan's *Chimes of Freedom* and that was the first song you played when you were in her band?

You see Helen was a very pivotal character in my life. At that point, the very first time we met Helen that was sorta like the thing that got the Dictators from *Girl Crazy* to *Manifest Destiny.* That's where the band that played *Manifest Destiny* got together. Then after the Dictators like sorta broke up the first time, I did the first of a few stints in Helen's band. Her guitar player, um, left to go tour with... I don't know it might have been with David Johansen actually. And she asked me to come audition musicians. The first time, even before that she had wanted me to help her audition guitar players. I remember actually Marshall Crenshaw coming to audition on bass. After the Dictators broke up, I was really in a bad way. My girlfriend had left me, my grandmother who I was very close with died. I had injured myself at the very beginning of the *Blood Brothers* tour. I had torn cartilage in my knee. For various periods of time I'd be laid up, I mean I couldn't afford any kind of operation, so I'd be laid up for lots of time and she asked me if I could come help her audition. My self-esteem, if I was to take effective stock in myself at that time, I would say, alright I'm a decent guitar player but I ain't great. I had been one of these guys who had stayed up until the sun came up every night all night trying to write a song and was pretty much unsuccessful for years in the Dictators. I really wanted to be able to do what Andy did in the Dictators, but was never able to do it, and then I figured OK, I'm a decent looking guy but no one is gonna pay me for my looks. This was actually how I thought of myself. And, the first time I helped Helen audition guitar players, we must have gone

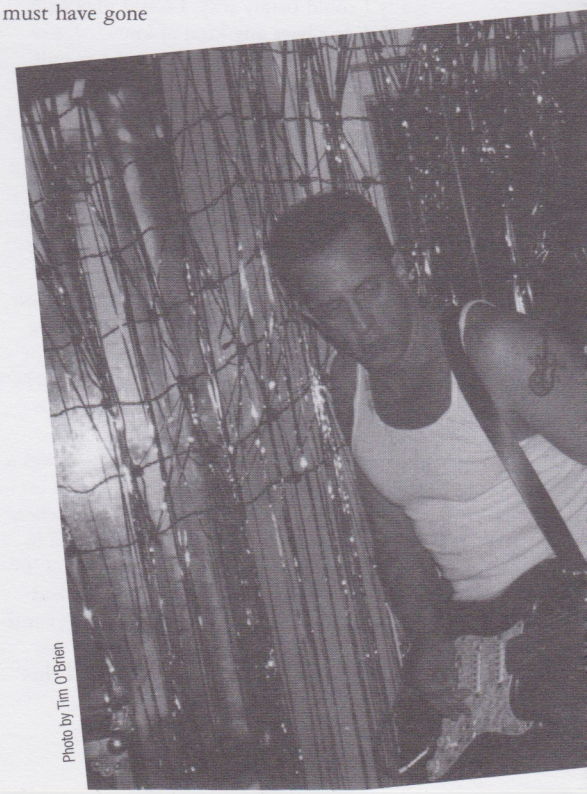
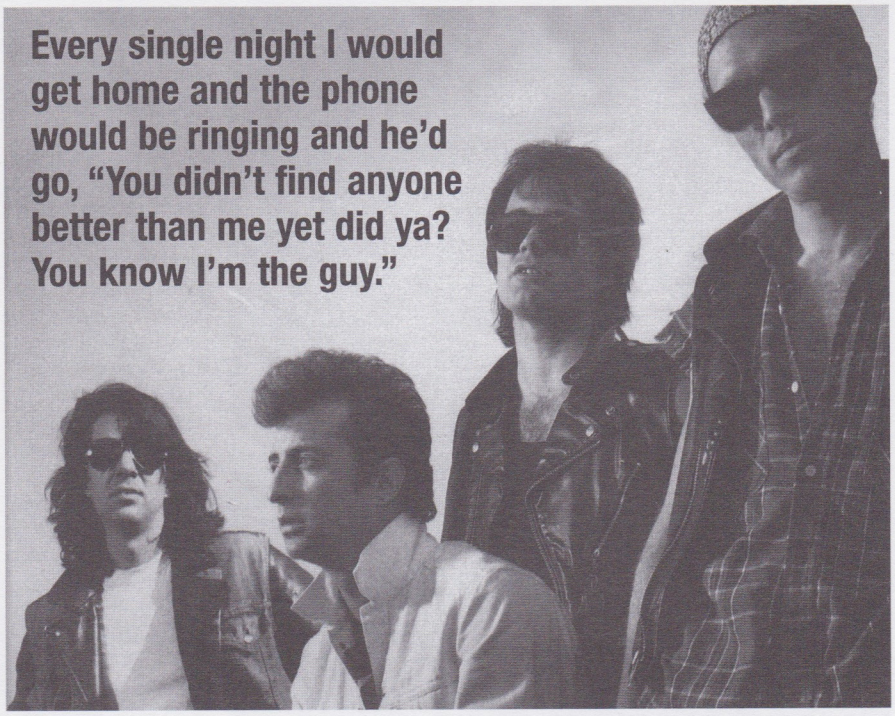


Photo by Tim O'Brien

through 40 guitar players and plenty of them could play faster than me, they knew fancier chords than me, were more adept, but it started to dawn on me that if I could get any of these motherfuckers on a stage I could tear their asses off. And that was the beginning of me getting the confidence to take it to eventually what set me on the road to who I am now. That was like the actual beginning point of me being a guitar player in a band where I wasn't as good as the lead guitar player. I wasn't as charismatic as the singer, and I wasn't as talented as the song writer, I was really second banana in all three things. This little bit of auditioning musicians for Helen really got me to thinking in a whole other kind of way. I actually ended up staying with Helen for a while. We put together a band right around then in '80, '81 and we started working on songs that I had written or was writing or she would write the lyrics and I would write music. And all of a sudden I'm writing songs and I'm starting to feel better about myself as a guitar player and my sensibilities of the music I liked. I mean there was always stuff the Dictators all had in common, like the Who. But for me I used to get myself revved by playing Chuck Berry's *Golden Decade*. And I had a real affinity for, I was like a 12 year old kid who had Muddy Waters records, you know. I was turned on to them by the Rolling Stones, like a lot of people from my generation. I genuinely loved that music and while I didn't feel like I was playing it, or wanted to play it. There was something evidently that planted a seed in me about American roots music. So that period was the beginning of me starting to feel like maybe I can do all these things that I never thought that I could do. And then the next time that I ended up with Helen was when she wanted me to replace her guitar player for a few months because he was going on tour with David Johansen. And this point Manny Caiati was playing with her who ended up in the Del-Lords with me. Now with Manny here and now the songs I'm working on with Helen, now there's a personality, a musical personality, a persona, there's like a sensibility, like a piece of clay that I'm managing to sculpt away at that I'm able find out who I am. And Manny really responded to my songs. Some of the first songs I had ended up on the first (Del-Lords) record, and he immediately just wanted to branch off he was like we gotta start a band. I was like really, you really think these songs are good? And Helen kept showing up in my life at points where I could have gone in directions that would have made me miserable for the rest of my life. And she just sorta got me back on track. That's the thing about Helen you know. It was just an amazing thing that she kept showing up in my life to get me started and to keep me on track and to get me to be the person that I... These are the very things that I personally define myself as an artist as much as the Dictators are in my DNA, I don't define myself anymore as being a rhythm guitar player in that band. It's this thing that I do and it's my best friends and I love it, but you know I'm a songwriter and



Helen, I'm not sure I really gotta say, I mean I guess you could say I would have been who I am anyway, but you can't rewrite history, that's the way it actually happened.

So it sounds like she was really pivotal in getting you help you to define yourself.

Helen was a Rock'n'roll soldier, and a sister, and I loved her. She was pivotal and also very encouraging. She was upset when I would leave and take musicians from her band with me. But it was all for the cause of rock'n'roll and she loved me. And that remained true to the end.

So that tribute record was to her (memory)?

Oh definitely. Anyway *Chimes of Freedom* was just a song I always wanted to do and it didn't have all the verses of Dylan but it was closer to the arrangement of the Byrds of it.

So Manny came in the band and Frank was the next piece of the puzzle (for the Del-Lords)?

Well Frank and Eric actually auditioned the very same day. Frank found out through a friend that Top Ten was looking for a drummer and Frank was the first of literally 35 drummers. Every single night I would get home and the phone would be ringing and he'd go, "you didn't find anyone better than me yet did ya? You know I'm the guy." He auditioned on a Monday and on Friday he was in. And Eric was working at a rehearsal studio and heard from somebody who auditioned for the band that I was looking for a guitar player and asked the guy what kinda band what are they playing? And he said horrible, they're playing like rock'n'roll, like Johnny Cash stuff, Creedence stuff, Rolling Stones, it's horrible. And Eric's going like yeah, that sounds terrible, got his number? And Eric and Frank auditioned at the same time and the first song we ever played together was that arrangement of *Folsom Prison* that's on the compilation. (*Get Tough: The Best of the Del-Lords,* Restless 1999)

I read an article one time on the Del-Lords that was in the USA Today, in the money section.

Yea, I remember that, should have been in the *no money* section.

Can you touch on what that article was on, the economics of a rock'n'roll band?

Well here you go. First of all, when you show a record contract, a standard record contract, to a lawyer in another business and it's like a joke to them. It's the closest thing to legalized slavery that there is. Let's just put it like this. Let's try to put it down to even numbers. A basic record deal will give you, as a new artist, 11 points or 12 points out of a 100 points, so that's like 11 or 12%. Now let's say the investment in the record, between recording costs and we're just gonna make up numbers, let say between recording costs and whatever else it comes out to $100,000. Now you don't start making money until you recouped that $100,000, which is not to say, let's just say that a record company gets $10 for a record when they sell it wholesale. It's not when they sell 10,000 records and have generated a $100,000, no no, it's when you have recouped $100,000 out of your 11 or 12% so by that point the record company has already taken in close to a million dollars by the time they're paying you one penny. You can just extrapolate that outwards and that's how it works. Out of everything they give you, you have to recoup it out of your measly percentage. Which you know makes it very difficult since I don't know what percentage of records out there sell 5,000 copies but I think it's probably less than 5%.



So the first two Del-Lords record were on the same label...

Yea, well we were actually signed to this brainchild of Gary Gersh, I don't know if you know Gary. He ended up becoming president of Capitol or Geffen or something. You'll see his name as executive producer of *Nevermind* even. He and the guy Steve Rabowski at Columbia, who I think was even responsible for signing *Def Jam* to Columbia. They had this brainstorm where they wanted to have a custom label with a sound not unlike Motown had a sound. Their sound was to be like the American guitar sound. They signed us and our good friends the Scorchers(Jason &) at the same time and that was gonna be what they were trying to do. They had connected EMI, the big money from EMI and the street creditability of Bill Heins label, which was called Enigma. So we were signed to EMI-Enigma. So that was the brainchild of Gary Gersh and Steve Rabowksi. Within a month, EMI-Enigma was out of business. As a matter of fact, it was really kinda odd because by the time that *Frontier Days* (1984) was released on a Monday or Tuesday, whatever it was back then, the presidency of EMI had changed hands and the first thing that he did as president of the label was out of 57 acts on the label, he dropped 27. We were among them. So here we were. We actually turned a few other labels down. First of all, because I had already been through the major label thing with the Dictators. I knew that it wasn't the answer to anything. And it seemed that everyone that was interested in signing the band had some other idea anything from getting a horn section to getting a girl singer. Cuz we were attempting to do this thing at the beginning, not quite equally, but the four of us shared lead singer duties and this just created a problem as far as marketing departments were concerned. And we were actually in the studio with money from Manny's cousin, who was an ear, nose, and throat guy. He had put up the money for us to go ahead and make an EP the way we wanted to make it. And Gary and Steve came along and they wanted to sign the band as is, no we don't wanna change you, no we don't think you need a girl singer, no we don't think you need a horn section. So then we ended up on EMI-Enigma, so after all this waiting around and the album finally came out, and in two days we're dropped. So long story short, we got back on the label. But by that point there was no EMI-Enigma and we ended up on EMI proper with Enigma still getting to have their imprint. But Bill, who out of all these people was really the one who loved the band, was pretty much shut out of the process. And even given all the bad history I had with big labels and knowing if you're on a big label and the big wheel isn't turning on your particular behalf that you might as well just throw your record out into the street or drop it out of a truck and say yea, we released it. Because that's about all you're gonna get and even with all that we were still susceptible to the big label coming in and talking their big fucking talk that they talked to everybody. And they were gonna get us a producer we wanted, which was Neil Geraldo, and everything was gonna be wonderful. They were gonna give us a video budget and we were off to the races. And so that was the beginning of the two records, the second and third records (*Johnny Comes Marching Home,* 1986, *Based on a True Story,* 1988) were more for EMI with the Enigma imprint. And then EMI itself went through a big reshuffle itself and divided themselves once again into Capitol, EMI and something called Manhattan. EMI-Manhattan or something. And out of all that, Bill Hein was still there, the only one going yea, I'm the only one that still wants the band. I'm the one that really believes in the band so we ended up over there (Enigma) for the last record (*Lovers Who Wander,* 1990). That's how that all worked out.

Were did you get the inspiration for the song on *Based on a True Story* called *"Crawl in Bed?"*

Well these days I'm really good friends with Dave Marsh and that song was based on Dave calling me up and asking us to play at a party for that magazine the *Nation*. I was honored. I'm an old fashioned leftie, you know. And it's a good magazine, a left wing magazine. It was celebrating it's 100th birthday. The party ended up being a Democratic Party, I wouldn't quite call it a fundraiser because no one was actually raising money, but it seemed less interested in representing the overall truth than in just promoting itself. It was this self-promotion party for Jesse Jackson, Bella Abzug. I don't know if you know Bella Abzug, and people like that. And if someone asked me to do something like that, I probably might have done it, but I really felt like I'd been taken advantage of. I felt like this isn't what I agreed to. And I remembered something Woody Guthrie said, "If you really want to know the truth you have be a liberal in a room full of conservatives, you have to be a conservative in a roomful of liberals and a worker in a roomful of bosses and a boss in a roomful of workers to really know what the truth is," and that's what that song is about. That song is like you may think I'm on your side and maybe I am. It's like I'm here for the truth and as far as I was concerned nobody had a monopoly on that.

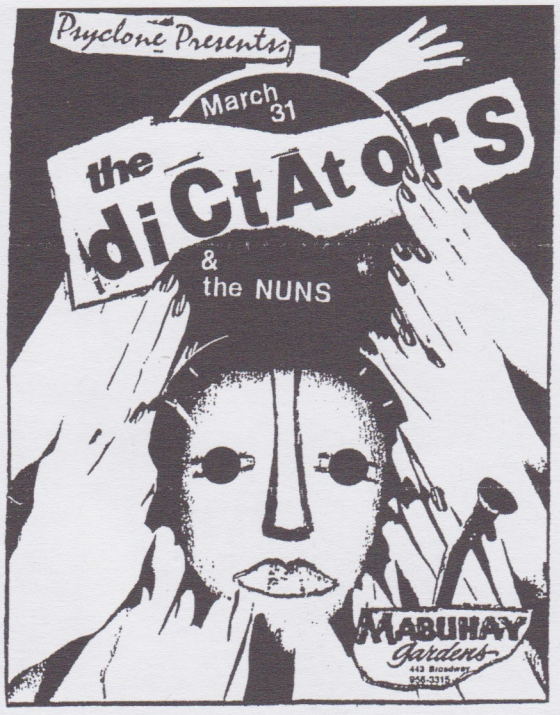
The song was kind of a personal manifesto?

That's exactly what is was and I was hoping that that was going to be the first single from the record and I was hoping that there was going to be a video and that I was just going to look into the camera and deliver that, because that's what it was, a statement of purpose.

Many lines from your songs stick in the head like "who needs fashion when you got style." Where do you come up with these lines? Explain your songwriting process. Are you first getting a melody on the guitar, or are you getting a lyric or title first?

If I could write lyrics as fast as I could write music, I think I would literally have five times as many songs. For me, it's like I'll hear a line, something will pop in my head, it'll be lit up, it'll illuminate itself somewhere inside me where there's some kind of resonance to it, some kind of relevance. There's some way in, there's something that I can find myself into this and there's just something to say about it. The music, in fact what I try to do, if there's something that I come up with musically, I try not to finish it because once I finish it, it becomes harder for me to apply lyrics to it than if it all sort of comes together. When I hear words, I hear the music. And that's kinda how that works for me. It's like a phrase will hit and it could be a phrase I said or heard all my life. Where there's a convergence of time and place with those particular words where all of a sudden it has words or meat to it, those words. And what it usually is, is that all my songs are really personal. You know Andy he's able to write songs about, he can write third party subjects. Well, I mean he's really great at it. In fact, very few of his songs have a real... There's not a real strong, not that he's emotionally detached from it, there's not a real strong sense of emotional self as opposed to intellectual self. With me, those lines, even

The Dictators is like a family you go back to no matter how old you get, no matter how many years of college, no matter how many jobs you've had and no matter how much life experience you've had. It's like everything is just like it was when you were a kid.



when I'm writing about something outside myself, it's really me, you know. I'm finding an emotional place inside those songs. And it's the same things with lines. I wish I could think of one just offhand to give you an example. You know I go to various places for inspiration. There are a few songs on *Based on a True Story* that were inspired by not necessarily the poem *Howl* but the collection *Howl*. I still have my little 75 cent Pocket Poets edition from 1961 or something, I don't know, and it has maybe 15 or 20 poems in there. And I'd go back to it and be like how did I miss that line and all of a sudden it would resonate and it would resonate into something within me and I don't know maybe it's my version of giving birth because I can't even always remember where, because to me writing songs is almost sometimes as much as getting out of the way of them as it is to carefully constructing them. You know that stuff comes in the rewrite. But usually what I do is if I'm hooked into something, I just keep following it. It's like if I go off course it's like hitting the curb while you're driving, you gotta get back in the lane. That's my whole thing when I'm writing is staying in the lane. And it amazes me that when I look back it's like having driven in the dark with no headlights on, like how did I get here. You know it's like I got here but it wasn't like I overly-intellectualized the process, it's like I under-intellectualized the process. But then when it comes out, I impress even myself *(laughs)*. I really can't explain any more concretely than that. There's like a lifeline. Songs have a life. The way you try to stay between the lines on the road, I try to stay true to that. And if it keeps feeling like that, I keep getting one foot ahead of the next, my left foot in front of my right. I get the next line and the next line and the next line after that and it's like I need a change here. And the music is all coming at the same time it's like once I get the structure of the music, I write together, I never just sit and write lyrics unless the music's already written and I need one more verse. Even then if I'm just writing the lyrics I do the same thing with that I'm trying to stay in between the lines, I'm not trying to over think it. And then maybe in the rewrite and maybe I'll want to change a line or two but that's the most. It's kind of this subconscious, unconscious thing.

It sounds like a very spiritual thing.

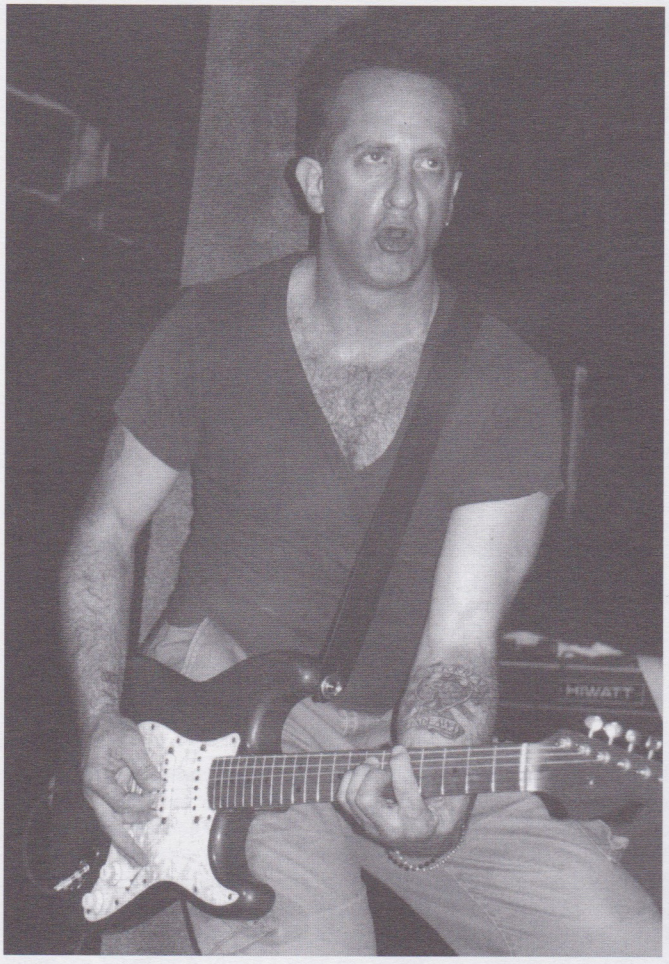
It is a very spiritual thing. Because it comes from that place, those are the same places faith comes from. And what is faith? Faith is something you really can't prove but you believe it, you feel it. And that's where my songs have to resonate for me, even the ones like *I Play the Drums,* that seem like they're just about fun. I take fun very seriously, you know and I take fun very spiritually. And they really come from that same place. Those type of higher places that human beings can go that you can't break into a mathematical equation, you can't break down into scientific proof. Those are the places that my songs come from for me.

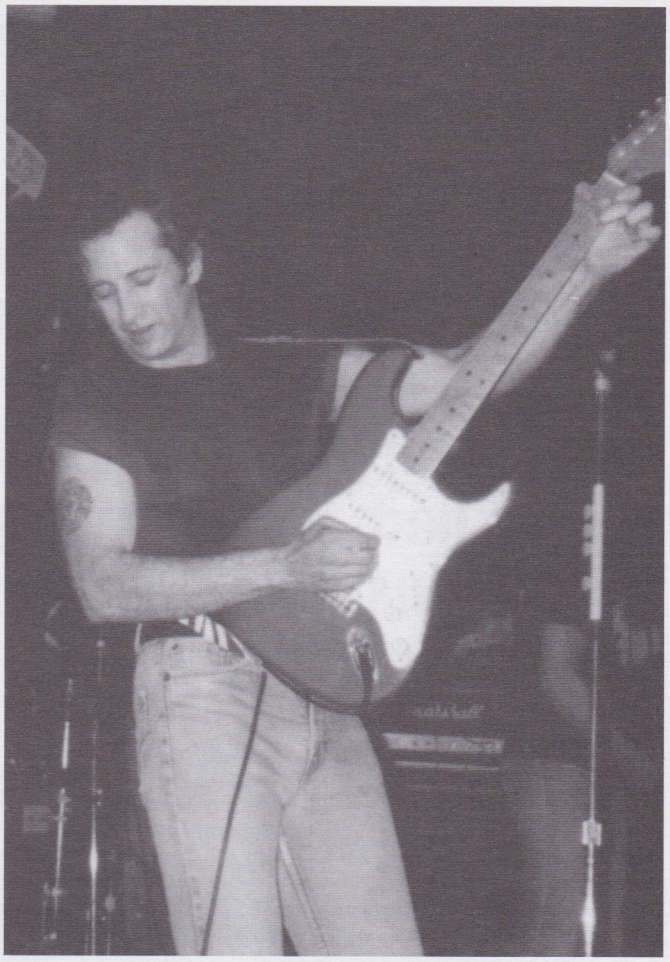
Those Del-Lords' songs of yours really stick with me over the years, I enjoy all styles of music, but your songs see like they have so much conviction, especially when you deliver them live…

And that's exactly the thing you know, I can tell you for me, for better or worse. I can guarantee you they're true for me. And that's what I ask for from all music I listen to like I wanna know and even if I disagree or I can't relate necessarily to somebody else's, to the specific data, the data can change but the range of human emotions and feelings are kinda finite, you know. Sometimes the more specific you can be about something that is so personal and experiences and street names and places and dates and what ever that are so particular to you, the more universal they are. Whereas if you try to tackle a big subject, you know to me journalism isn't songwriting. You know what I mean? And to me too many songwriters, it's more like journalism, I mean, I don't wanna, this isn't a textbook. I wanna learn things about not just the data of the experience, I wanna feel what it was like to experience what you experienced. Just telling me what you did, then it's not poetry, you know. Poetry is when you take those things and you re-experience what you experience in some kind of empathetic, sympathetic way what the writer was feeling. It's like Springsteen, I didn't grow up in Asbury Park, I didn't have those same experiences. My dad was an accountant, he wasn't a blue collar guy. But I feel his songs like the motherfucker is reading my mail.

Speaking of journalism, I've read some stuff you've written, not songs, some articles here and there, you really have a talent for it, it seems like you should be doing more of that kind of writing.

I would like to you know, it's hard for me to find the right form. I just can't write on command. I can't write like an editor giving me an assignment for this that or the other. I have to have some real sort of real connection to it. And that has really limited me I think. I'd love to find something like that. That I could really sink my teeth into cuz I enjoy that kind of writing as well. But it's got to be something that I could sink my teeth into as like a song. This live album I did with Dion album just came out (*Live in New York, Dion & the Little Kings,* Ace, 2001). Besides the songs, I wrote some liner notes for that.





Photos by Tim O'Brien

You have a solo record, *Saving Grace,* in the can, that's not out yet? Are you trying to shop it around or are you gonna put it out yourself?

It's like right, now, yea definitely. It's right now businesswise I'm being ripped off for everything I've done since I started as a songwriter. Everything, literally.

So you're not getting any money for the Del-Lords songs?

I've gotten money, but not enough as I should have. I have new record it's called *Saving Grace.* I'm really excited about it. To me its by far the best thing I've ever done. It's really me. You know there's no other guitar players on the record. My good buddy Michael Caiati, Manny's brother, he and his brother Albert own a recording studio, rehearsal studio in Brooklyn called Coyote and mean God bless Michael and Albert they let me make this whole record on spec. I owe them a ton of money. And they just have always believed in me and the put their money where their mouth is. Michael is um, you know I'm good in the studio but I'm not technical, I don't know all the technical lingo. But I can talk to Michael and Michael engineered the record and was there with me 12-14 hours a day hoping they'd get their money some day but doing it for the love of the music and just out of sheer faith. I owe those guys everything.

Well you've got some real true believers on your side.

You know I've always been blessed by that. It's like people that I work with they can pick that up from me, it's like I'm not just doing this, I would be doing this for free. I am really believe to the bottom of my soul in rock and roll. It's corny, it may be naive, it may just ending up being the death of me. That's just honestly who I am and what I do. Everyone I've ever worked with has responded to that and those are the people I found. Eric, Frank and Manny, like it said in those liner notes *(Get Tough: Best of)* we used to joke, like Elwood Blues, going yea, we're on a mission from God. It's like fuck, if we didn't believe that...And that was why we had Manny's cousin investing money in the band and we were just four people trying to get a record out there. We had road crews, I'm not just talking about the band members, I'm talking about the road crews, our friends, we were almost like a religious thing. We really believed in what we were doing. There are people out there who aren't totally tainted by cynicism aren't knocked around by life's hard knocks, who want to believe and still do believe in stuff. And I've been really lucky. I mean, fuck, I get to work with Dion.

I remember the last time (1990) the Del-Lords played in Houston and Austin and you told me that your guitar tech, Javier, had flown in all the way from Spain just to work that Texas tour.

Javier and I are brothers bound together to the end by this shared experience. There are people out there that believe. And we attracted that because they knew that we weren't kidding. It's like there are people waiting for something like that. I really think that faith and belief or whatever it is that a person believes in that. It's like a basic human function as eating and sleeping and going to the bathroom. I really think that people need that in their lives and that people are always starved for it. And I believe that people respond to it. I've made a career banking on that. So far so good.

I think that's why your music has stood the test of time, that what you just said comes across (in your music). With all the 30,000 or so records that come out every year you don't find that very often...

Everyone is in love with the image, everyone is in love with the idea. Even when I was twenty years old, it wasn't about money and girls for me. Money's great, girls are great, but it was always about the music for me. Always. You hear like Gene Simmon's tell ya that anyone that tells you that is a lie. And for me that tells me more about Gene Simmons than it says about all the people that he'd like to put in that little box labeled cynics and this is what they're really about. But there are people that really do it for the music.

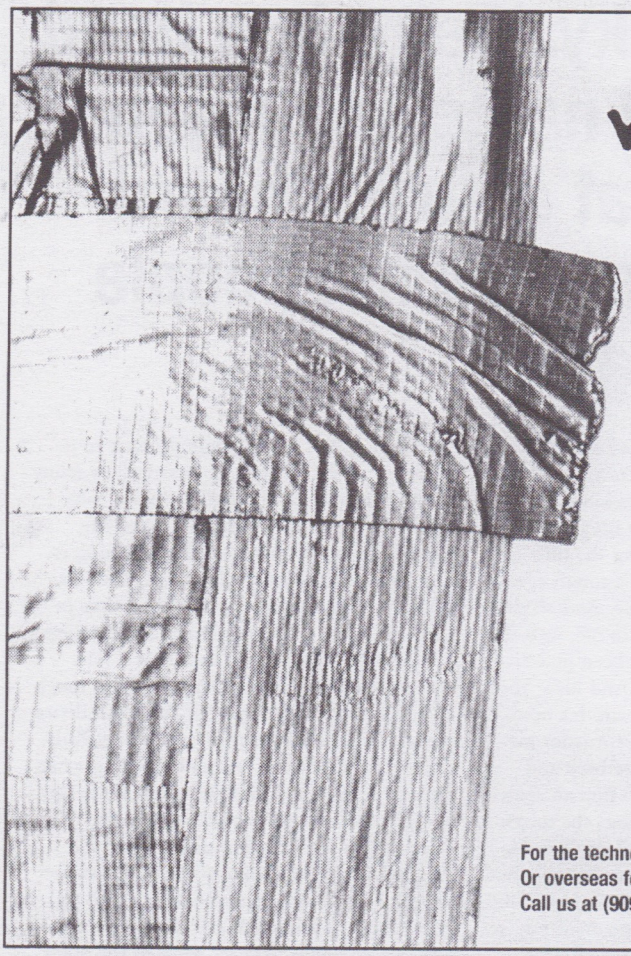
And you know we're lucky. We're in a band that's kinda like a brand name and maybe there's 10,000 people that actually heard the band, but there's like a million people that have heard of the band.

Yea we saw a band called the Hudson Falcons last night, from Jersey City, along with two other bands from out of town and there were maybe 4 people there that weren't with the band yet they all still played as if there life depended on it.
That's what it's all about. It's like Joe Dimaggio said, when someone asked him, it's like the season, you guys (already) won the pennant, why are you guys playing so hard? And he said "Cuz there might be somebody out there who never saw me play." That's the attitude that I carry with me no matter what I do. And you know what if you end up getting hit by a car that night you ended up going out right. We played one night in San Jose for the guy that was gonna be our road manager and he was the only one there. And he just couldn't believe it. We played like the place was full and going crazy and had paid $20 a ticket and we were all gonna wait to give autographs. Cuz you never know when it's gonna be your last time. And you better never dog it cuz someone is watching.

As we do this interview, the new Dictators record (*D.F.F.D.*, Dictators Multimedia, 2001)is out one month now. How important was it to do it yourself?
It was everything. Not just financially, but spiritually that we were not gonna give this record away. We're not gonna give away what took us almost 23 years you know to come out with a new record. It made no sense in any fashion, business wise, spiritually, fun wise to give this record to somebody that was give it a shelf life of like six weeks and then decide that it was over. And this way we own it, it's ours, it's our baby. We know what's best for our band, we don't need to get out there and be beholden to anybody else. And we just followed that through all the way. If you're not gonna get on MTV or regular TV or the radio, there's no reason to sign with a big label. That's all that they can do for you that you can't do on your own. I mean distribution is the biggest problem. And you know we're lucky. We're in a band that's kinda like a brand name and maybe there's 10,000 people that actually heard the band, but there's like a million people that have heard of the band.

Now that you're living in L.A. is the band still gonna be playing gigs?
That's the thing, we need to play shows that make sense, that we can afford to play, that we can make money doing it, because it costs money to play shows and there isn't the big company out there that's footing the bill. Personally for me last year was a tough year. I went through a hard sad divorce. And all that publishing money that's owed to me, well if that had come in I would have been in a different situation. But it didn't. And New York is an unbelievably expensive town. It's not even close to how much cheaper it is for me to live out here and to commute back and forth than it would be to try to find an apartment. I mean Bedford Stuyvesant, the toughest neighborhood in Brooklyn. I don't think you could find a one-bedroom apartment that would be under a thousand dollars. Here I'm sharing a nice one-bedroom apartment for $700 and it's infinitely cheaper. And now something that was on the back burner that's now on the front burner since the first record *(Frontier Days)* we did with Neil Geraldo. With Neil, it was like meeting a long lost brother. I think of Neil more like a brother than a friend. And we've been talking about a band called the Sicilians, like we've had the name for 15 years now. And even though for years and years the Benatar (Geraldo's wife) thing was a big thing, label, hit records on the road type machine. He's also got two little girls. And we always wanted to do this thing and even now that they're under the radar as far as the mainstream hit radio or whatever, it's still a pretty busy high finance operation. And it's something we've always wanted to do. Cuz the kinda of songs I write are pretty rooted in America roots music, British music. He will take those songs and turn them into something that I never would have thought of. We have a true musical relationship where this thing we do together is really different that the thing we would do separately. It's just a really great thing, everything just sorta converged for me, like this was now gonna be the perfect time. Cuz now they only go and play out in the summer and Patty wants to do a little more acting and her first priority in life is as a mother. And Neil has a studio and he's just like me he just wants to make music everyday. We're finally gonna get to do that. We have around 17 songs we're working on. I'm really anxious to be in a band again, and on the other hand I'm in a band with the Dictators. And the Dictators is like a family you go back to no matter how old you get, no matter how many years of college, no matter how many jobs you've had and no matter how much life experience you've had it's like everything is just like it was when you're a kid. The relationships you had are just like they were in the beginning. I love the Dictators but there's no room in the Dictators for me as a songwriter. The Dictators are very much, as much a I relate to and feel a part of the sensibilities of the Dictators, I can really not successfully contribute as a writer without defusing what makes the Dictators the Dictators. I'd be the last guy that would want to remake the Dictators in my image or dilute what the Dictators are just to have a few songs on the record. I appreciate that about rock and roll. I remember the lessons of the last Creedence Clearwater album, let's let some of the other guys write a few. The next thing you know there's no more Creedence Clearwater Revival. No, let's let the guy whose the best suited guy. Andy is the one who articulates the Dictators' vision and that's just the way it is. And I'm proud to be a part of it and I dedicated a huge part of my life to helping him articulate or realize that vision. But on the other hand I miss being in a band. In the Del-Lords, I was the center of the creative engine. I mean we all contributed in every conceivable way, arranging and playing, none of the songs would have been the same with anyone else playing them than it would have been without Eric or Frank or Manny. I miss that. And with Neil it's like a chance to have that again. The Sicilians are something that I'm really excited about.

To wrap it up, who's gonna save rock'n'roll?
That's a weird question these days. First of all if you ask 15 people what rock and roll is you'd probably get 15 different answers. I think the thing that really remains important is that rock and roll needs to have one foot always in the present, an eye toward the future one foot very firmly rooted in the great tradition of American roots music. And in the tradition of American roots music I don't just mean in the blues form, the country form or the R&B form. I mean in the honesty and what it represents and the thread that runs throughout history and the things that have been important to human beings since time began.



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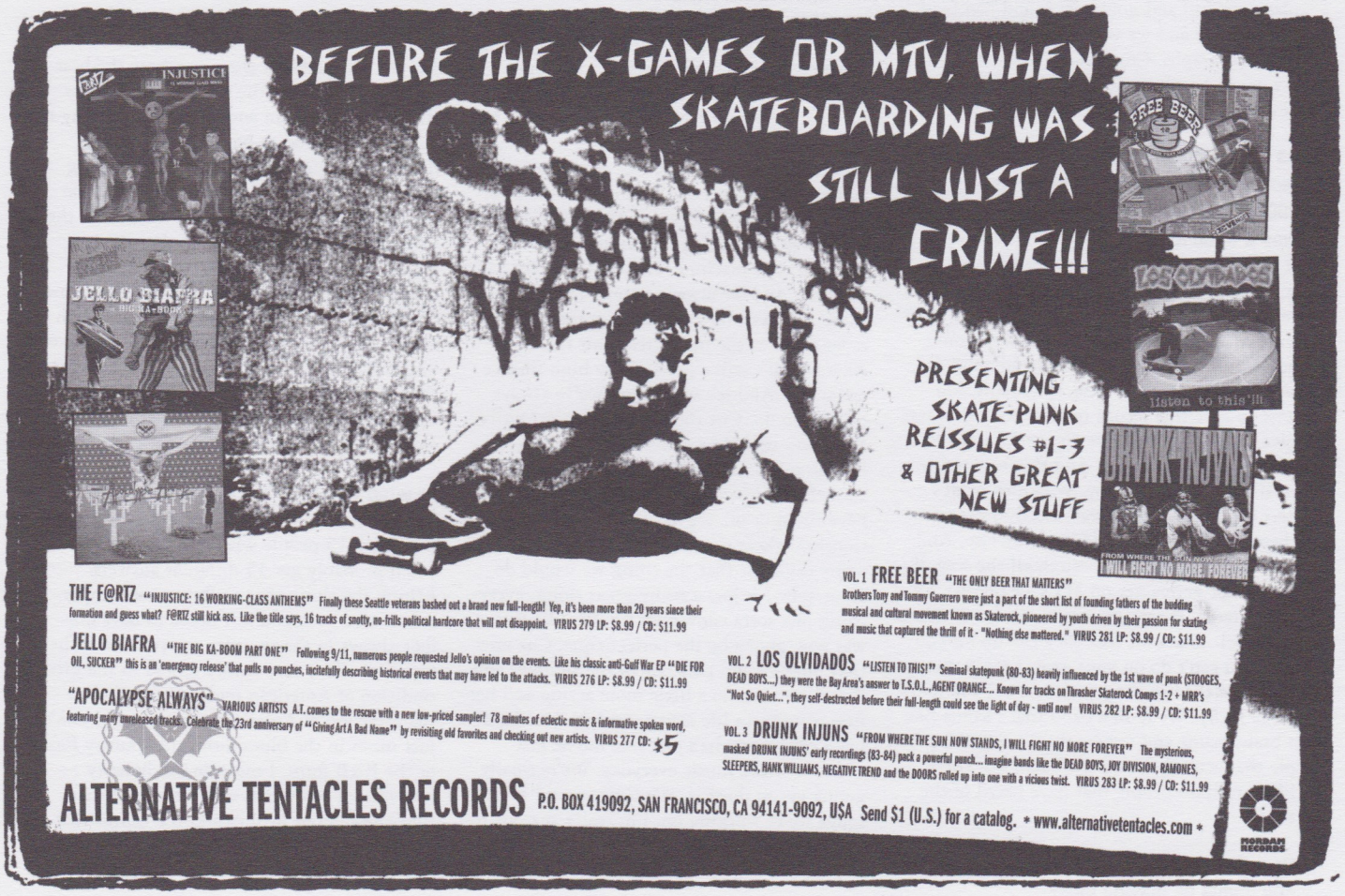
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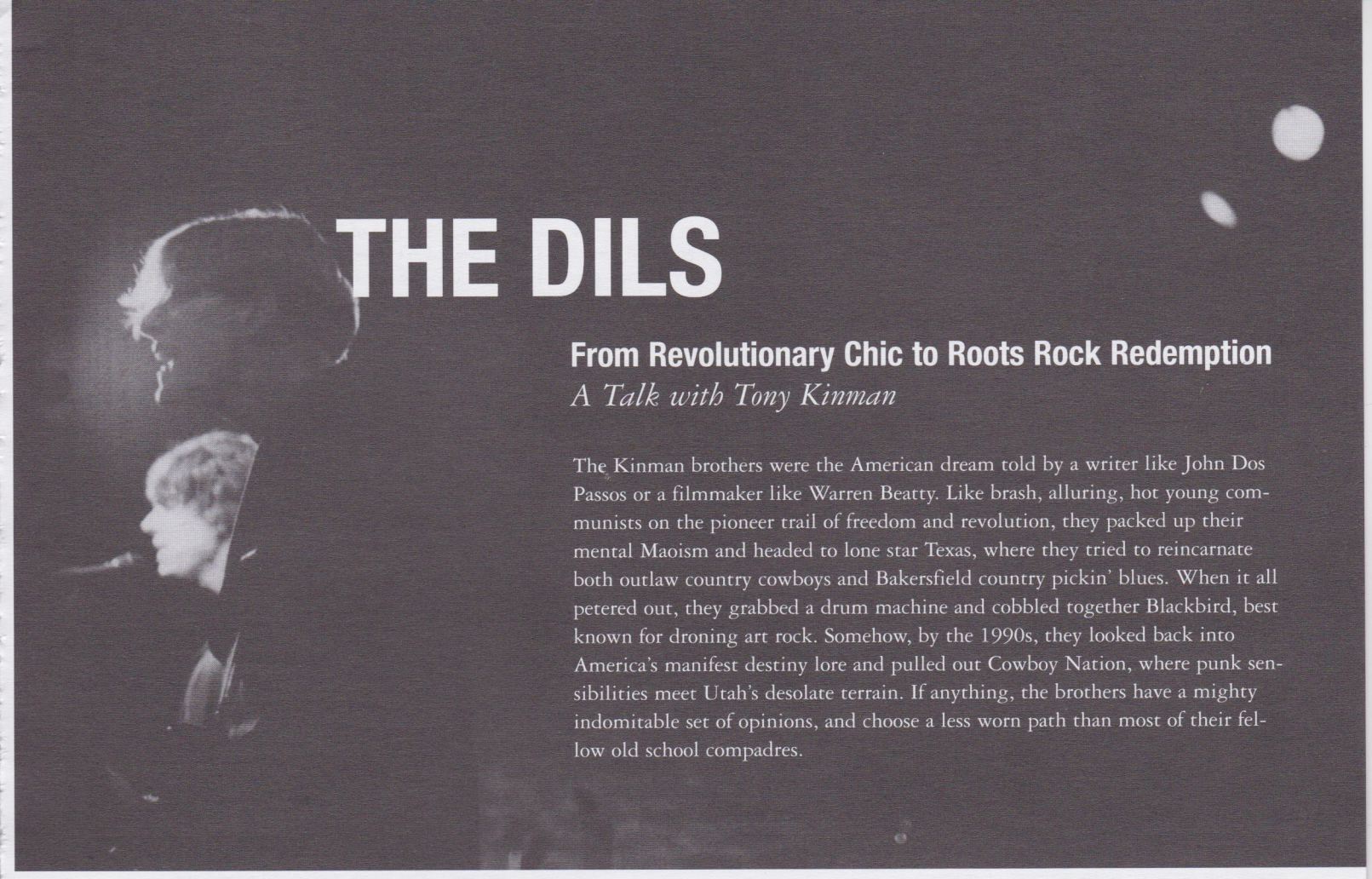


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THE DILS

From Revolutionary Chic to Roots Rock Redemption

A Talk with Tony Kinman

The Kinman brothers were the American dream told by a writer like John Dos Passos or a filmmaker like Warren Beatty. Like brash, alluring, hot young communists on the pioneer trail of freedom and revolution, they packed up their mental Maoism and headed to lone star Texas, where they tried to reincarnate both outlaw country cowboys and Bakersfield country pickin' blues. When it all petered out, they grabbed a drum machine and cobbled together Blackbird, best known for droning art rock. Somehow, by the 1990s, they looked back into America's manifest destiny lore and pulled out Cowboy Nation, where punk sensibilities meet Utah's desolate terrain. If anything, the brothers have a mighty indomitable set of opinions, and choose a less worn path than most of their fellow old school compadres.

One of you said that the whole point of playing rock music was to keep it simple and pure as possible in the sense of Little Richard, Bo Diddley, and early Elvis, then what is the spirit or point of playing cowboy roots music?

I think it's the same thing basically. To me, that's a matter of personal taste. Well, I think the weight of popular art tends to collapse under the weight of complexity. Not necessarily the weight of intelligence, because intelligence is always a welcomed asset to anything it's brought to, but under the weight of complexity. Well, let's use rock music as an example. To me, if you are going to talk to an alien, and he says, what is this rock music you are talking about, and you had Little Richard (imagine a *Twilight Zone*) and he's in a plastic booth playing "Lucille," then in another Plexiglas booth you have Rick Wakemen doing "The Six Wives of Henry VIII," which one are you going to point to and say, that's rock music? You are going to point to Little Richard, at least in my mind. I think it's the same in cowboy type of music, or cowboy music. To me, the truest and most beautiful forms of that are like those two volumes (I don't remember what label) of actual old recordings of people singing traditional cowboy songs. They were mostly unaccompanied, very crude recordings, something that Peter Case would probably know all about, because I don't know that much about the nuts and bolts details of old stuff like that. It's very simply delivered and you actually get to the core of the music without hearing a lot of other stuff. Of course, you can take that sort of thing to the extreme, but I think that all things being equal, and all things being considered, I think simplicity allows you to get to the elements of popular music that actually communicate something, that might have some meaning or some worth to it rather than chops or production or whatever else gets layered on top of it time after time. A good example of that is when people later in certain points of their careers start re-recording versions of their songs to "update" them for modern artists. I know country performers did this a lot. It's rarely an improvement on the original thing, because it's rarely in the form of simplifying something. It's usually in the form of gussying it up, putting more fins or chrome on the car or lights on it, but you're going, the car was best when it had a good engine in it and a fender and a stick shift and you could go fast and it didn't matter what kind of paint it had on it or how much chrome it had on it. To me, it seems the same in popular music. I think in so-called higher art forms of music, that's not necessarily true, but I think in previous times popular art meant appeal to a popular audience. I think simplicity is good, especially in popular art forms that are not so distanced from their actual folk sources or root sources.

Do you think that people often confuse simplicity with being pedestrian? They hear something they assume is common and easy, but there's really something more deep and complex to it. For example, I might use the example of the poet Langston Hughes, who uses a simple, direct language, but it does not mean he is a simple man.

No, because actually in some ways once you reach a certain point, especially knowing he was an educated man, simplicity actually becomes a discipline, almost an intellectual discipline you impose on yourself. I mean, I can listen to Robert Johnson, well, that's a bad example because his music is actually complex, but I can listen to music played by, well, an old recording by somebody who obviously had never been educated, probably an illiterate, very crude performance but honest delivery, unschooled, and I can hear and know the context of that. You know that's one of the reasons it will have a primal flavor to it, because it is in fact primal. There's not a whole lot of affectation. It's very close to the source, and it's very close to the roots. Whereas if you go into something like, well, one of my favorite albums of all the times, the first Ramones' album, the music in that is very simple, but to me it's an artistic simplicity. Those guys did not grow up... Well, that record was cut in the contemporary world of "The Six Wives of Henry VIII." It was cut in the world of Steely Dan, cut in the world of Jethro Tull, in the world of pop music getting ever and ever more complex, and that album was a brilliant intellectual reaction to that. There is the studied simplicity. It takes a lot of disci-

pline. I'm a bass player, and I know that. Like I go into Guitar Center to buy some strings or something and I'll hear these kids on a Saturday all sitting there trying all the gear and there's all this stuff coming out of the amps. Chip and I were in there the other day buying some recording tape, and there was a guy in there with a fretless five string bass just doing all kinds of stuff, and here in L.A. we have the Bass Institute of Technology, the school in which a lot of these people come out of, and I often wonder does anybody ever… Well, if I was a bass teacher, I would tell a student, hey, you are going to sit down and for an hour, here's the D, here's the fifth fret on the A string, you are going to play an eighth note for an hour and nothing else.

Do you think it would be the first time they've actually ever really heard that note?
Well, you know yeah. It would teach them this is important to know, it's important to know that, it's important to know how to play like Dee Dee Ramone, or it's important to know why Dee Dee Ramone played the way he did, and why that is sometimes the right thing to play. To get back to the point of Langston Hughes, sometimes simplicity is discipline, is communicating whatever it is you want to communicate in a direct and effective way. Once you reach a point of knowing, let's assume that you are not an illiterate sharecropper, that you were born and lived within a space of five miles somewhere, in the days back before rural electrification, but once you reached an age of awareness in the modern world simplicity does require discipline, because there is so much information out there now and to pull back and find simplicity is a matter of discipline and temperament and creativity, everything that goes into something worth making.

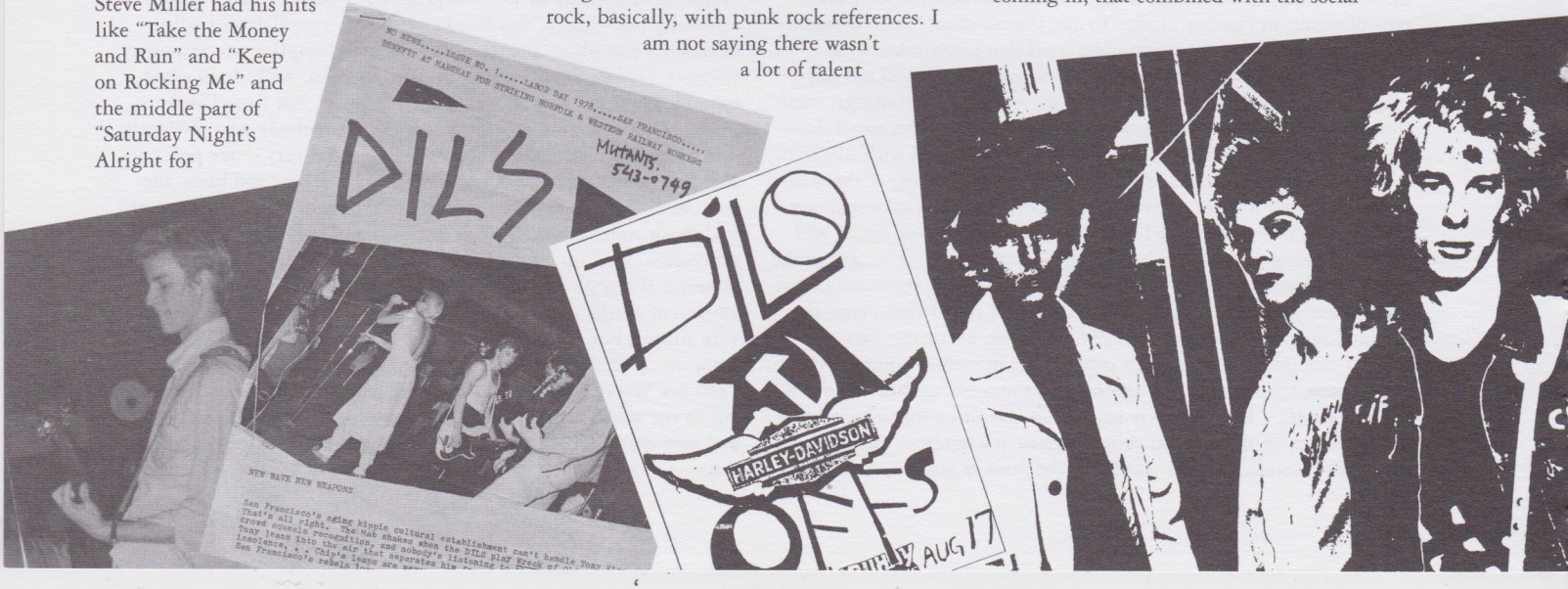
Do you think the early 1970s were as bad (over-produced, shlocky) for country music as it was for rock music?
Yeah, but you know David, you can take an overview of something like that now, but you can't as it's happening. For instance, I remember being a kid in the 1970s and driving around and the only guitar songs on the radio at the time was when Steve Miller had his hits like "Take the Money and Run" and "Keep on Rocking Me" and the middle part of "Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting" by Elton John. That was the only guitar you heard on radio, because there wasn't any oldies radio then. That was the only stuff you heard. You heard all sorts of John Lennon, and saxophones on everything, and just that really cocaine flavored jazz rock music that was big at the time, as well as the art music like Utopia, then those horrible stadium bands like Journey and stuff like that. I remember that was the only guitar you could hear, but at the time I wasn't thinking, wow, we are in a really bad era for rock music, because I didn't know when it began or if it was going to end, it just was. It's the same thing with country music. We can look back and say that there was a lot of garbage there, but there was a lot of good stuff too. You know, Don Williams was happening, who I like, and Waylon and Willie were cutting good stuff. There was a lot of garbage, but there's always a lot of garbage. There's a lot of garbage now. My basic rule of thumb when it comes to anything, whether it's movies, music, or books, is that at least 90 percent of it is going to be shit. At least, and sometimes it will get up to 99 per cent shit. Only a tiny fraction of anything at any one time is going to be really good. I think when popular art forms tend to enter a period of lassitude in the short run or absolute decadence in the long run, when you can basically tell it is over, I think there's other signs of it other than over-production or stuff like that. One of the real signs, one of the reasons now why rock music itself is in an actual period of terminal decadence as far as any creativity goes is because it's becoming completely self-referential. There is no real change in it any more. If you look back on the eras of rock music from, say, Chuck Berry to the Beatles breaking up, which is a span of maybe… Well, Chuck Berry was still having hits in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but you've got a span of like thirteen years. Thirteen years ago it was 1989. There hasn't been any significant earthquake change in at least white popular music; well, the last real change in white popular music was punk rock.

Would you include Nirvana in the larger arc of punk rock?
No, I think Nirvana and the whole grunge thing was a continuum of white stadium rock, basically, with punk rock references. I am not saying there wasn't a lot of talent and quality in that stuff, I'm not saying this was shit. There wasn't a significant change. Its commercial success was, but the music wasn't. In the sense that Elvis was, or the Beatles were, or the Sex Pistols or Ramones were. Those things were qualitative changes in the midst of the status quo, or compared to the status quo of the time. In saying qualitative, I don't mean in the sense… Well, obviously the Sex Pistols and Ramones didn't enjoy the same commercial success that the grunge bands did, but not counting the commercial aspect of it, the creative aspect of it, the actual shake up of the ambience of the genre or the standards. The standards changed because of that. I think in white popular music there hasn't been any change. The last gasp of real change was the original punk rock era, and in black music nothing has really changed since the early days of hip hop.

But people might ask, why aren't Chip and Tony making it change, because Cowboy Nation isn't that far removed from the Dils and Rank and File, and people tag it "heritage" or "preservation" music, not new music.
Well, I think it takes more than an individual, it takes a weltanschauung…

One of those German words!
Yeah, one of those German words, but the time has to be ready for it. One, I think that the social conditions being right and people coming together is what actually creates that moment. You know, rock'n'roll would not have existed without the electric guitar. The electric guitar had been around for a long time, and Elvis was not an electric guitar player, but it was an integral part of his sound, then you had people who were guitar players like Chuck Berry or Buddy Holly and Bo Diddley. They couldn't have done what they did with an acoustic guitar. The same goes with hip-hop and rap. Drum machines, there you go, that's what did it.

Or turn tables.
The thing is, turn tables had been around for a long time and scratching and stuff like that had been around for awhile, but programmed music, the real computerized age of music coming in, that combined with the social





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ambience of the inner city, the people who were ready to hear something that wasn't there, that's why it changed. Punk rock was a qualitative change at the beginning, but the reason why I don't think it made any quantitative change at first was because the audience was not simply there for it, at least here in States. It definitely wasn't here for it. It took a whole new generation of people entering the record buying demographic in order to create grunge or stadium punk. Because those people simply did not exist back in the early days, they weren't there. They hadn't been born yet.

But 3,000 people did show up for the Sex Pistols show in San Francisco.

But you know the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind…* just went gold a few years ago? That's a mind-blowing thing to realize. That one album, which is one of the two great albums created from the original punk rock era, that and the Ramones' first album, only just now went gold. I don't even know if the Ramones' first album has gone gold yet. Compare that to however much *Nevermind* sold, ten-fifteen million?

And both had major labels behind them pushing the records.

The sad fact of show business is, when you are talking show business, you are talking numbers. You know, five million Elvis fans can't be wrong. I'm sorry, it's numbers that count. I love some great, little, obscure records, but don't see when I go shopping or walking down the street these records on somebody's T-shirt or somebody with a tattoo of this band's name. It's the other stuff. I don't walk into a house and see somebody with a wall of pictures of these people. That's show biz, that's the way it is. It's a cold hard fact, but it's true.

You've also said that within that very small segment of the music scene of punk rock, the Dils had an even smaller sliver. The Weirdos could draw five times the numbers of people. You even said, "We were not a popular band, we were an unpopular band, people did not like the Dils, and we were the enemy." Why?

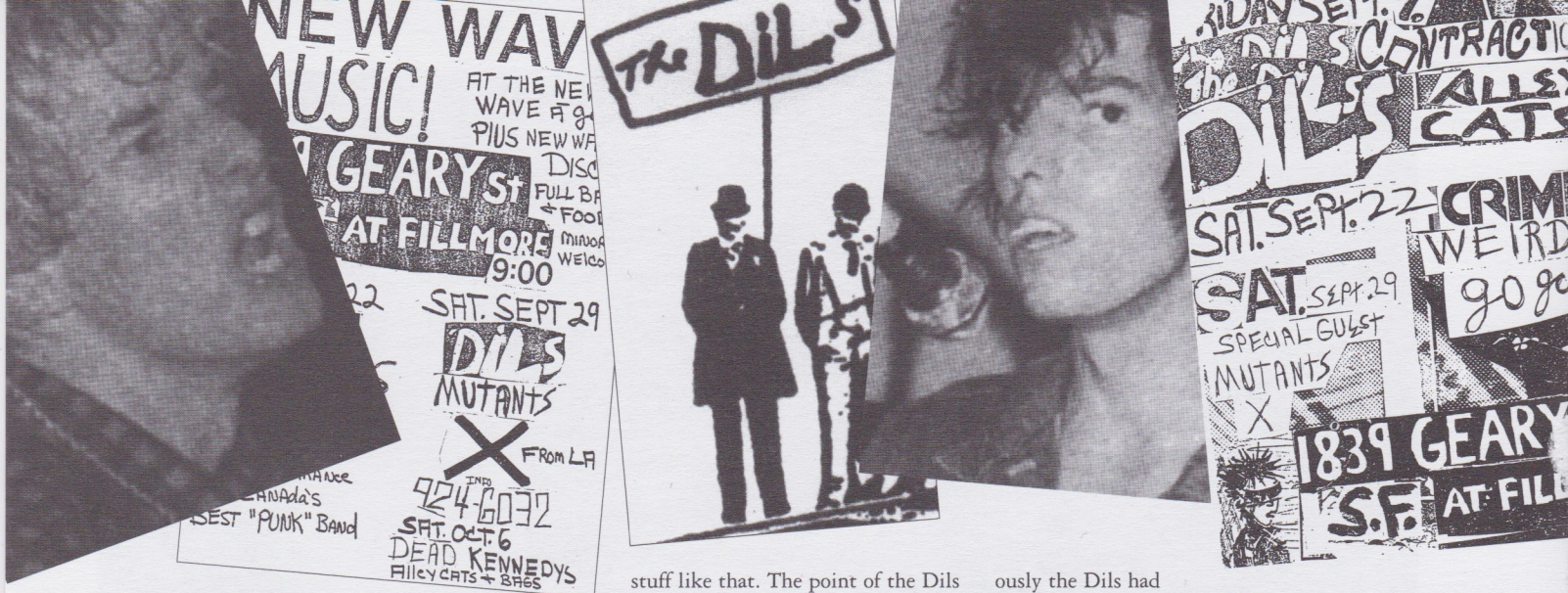
The Dils would have ebbs and flow in popularity. And of course, this was within a very short amount of time. The Dils were only around two years. A lot of it was very scene oriented. In the sense that if we said something in a *Slash* interview or *Flipside* and it pissed somebody off that week, them and fifty of their friends and buddies wouldn't come out because the word would get out and they would say, fuck those assholes, I am not going to go to the show. I think the Weirdos live were a better band than we were. We tended to be more hit and miss. The Weirdos were like a great punk rock machine. They put on great shows. The Dils did have good shows, but we also, for some reason, I don't know, Chip and I have always been turds in the punch bowl or something *(laughs)*. Or shit disturbers, we stir up shit. When you are working within a scene type thing among your peers, let's say there's three or four hundred punk rockers up and down the west coast of California, and you do something or say something in an interview or play something that ripples the water a little bit, people react against that. People, especially at a certain stage when they feel like their identity is at stake and they feel like they have invested heavily in this character they have become, they don't necessarily want to get thrown a wild card. They don't want somebody monkeying with the works, in the sense that I just went out and bought my bondage clothes, and now you are wearing a plaid shirt. Stuff like that. It could have been just little things like that. The Dils were a good band, and when we would play we'd definitely have some good evenings, but back at the time, we didn't hit the consistent level of a band like the Weirdos, who were consistently good night after night. I mean, the Weirdos shows were something to see. Soon after the original bunch of punk rock bands, that's when you started getting the machine type bands that were consistently hard hitting night after night after night.

Like Fear and X or something?

Not so much X, because they were never a real machine band, I mean bands like the Dead Kennedys, or a lot of the bands from Orange County…

TSOL?

And a lot of the SST type bands. Black Flag is a good example, or the Minutemen. It was like there was an almost physical discipline to



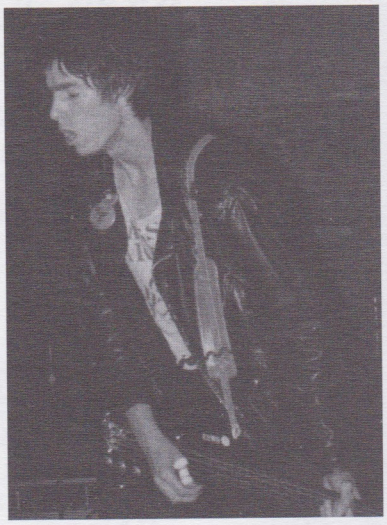
their shows. I always like things on stage that were a little bit loose or fuzzy around the edge, in the sense that there was room for things to happen musically or performance wise, so when the machine bands really started happening it wasn't really my taste. Compared to a band like the Sleepers, one of the original bands back then, although the Sleepers were not a punk rock band, but they were in the punk rock scene, because they fit nowhere else, and they were an awesome band to watch live because you literally never knew what was going to happen. It wasn't like performance art. In fact, it was hardly performance at all. It was real. They were mesmerizing to watch because their music was fantastic, and you knew every time you saw them play, something was unfolding from the moment they stepped on stage to the moment they left, but not in a conscious way, but in an unconscious way, because the people who were in it...Kim, the drummer, I don't think he was loaded, but I think most of the guys in the band were, and it definitely contributed to their performance.

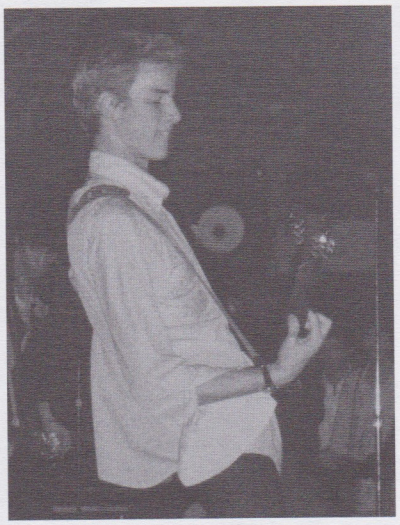
Another difference between the first and second waves of punk is the sheer number of records the second bands produced and the current availability of them. If you go into a record store, most likely it's impossible to find records by the Bags, Mutants, and Crime, but you'll always find some version of the Dead Kennedys or Black Flag records. I mean, the Dils only recorded singles, which creates a different niche in the market place. It literally makes you fall into a black hole until somebody releases an anthology.

SST is a good example of that. The guys at SST wanted to create a market. That was their point- to create a label identity and make records and sell them. I remember those guys joking about creating a Black Flag franchise, like creating other Black Flag bands, like here's your set, this is the Black Flag of Cleveland or whatever, which is a fascinating idea. That was their point. I'll speak for myself as far as an old school punk on stuff like that. The point of the Dils was never to make records and never to have a career. It was never like the Dils' 20th anniversary, the Dils' reunion tour, the Dils' greatest hits, it was never ever to do that. Making a record to us was like, some guy walks up to you and says, hey man, I want to make a 45 single, and you're like, alright, and pick out the two best songs in your set at the time, and go in and for a day or a couple hours and make a record and walk away. It comes out a month or so later and there's your record. We never even once thought of making an album. It just wasn't what it is. Every several months someone would come up, like Chris from What Records?, who put out "I Hate the Rich," or the guys from Dangerhouse, or the guy up in Canada, and say hey, you guys want to do another record, and we were like sure, let's go in. We took our strongest songs from then and put them out. It was never to do like a SST type thing.

But are you saying that even a label like Dangerhouse was fundamentally different than SST?

Yeah, I think so. The guys at Dangerhouse were serious about what they were doing, but those guys at SST wanted to make a label and were serious about it. Dangerhouse might have been serious, but it wasn't at the same level of intensity. Those guys at SST were driven to do what they do. All of those bands on there saw what they were doing as this is something we can make some money at, not in the sense that it was the only reason they were doing it, but they saw that as part of what was going on. The Dils did not care about that at all. Not in the sense that it was radical revolutionary, but we just didn't because it wasn't part of our temperament. We were enjoying what we were doing at the time in the moment and we weren't thinking about that. There's a guy writing a book here about punk rock and he's been doing extensive interviews with what he calls the original five, which is what he calls the Zeros, the Screamers, the Weirdos, the Dils and the Germs. He was asking me about things, because he had done all this research and talked to other people, that were things obviously the Dils had done or were done to the Dils, just Dils stuff, and I simply did not remember half of it because it was not important. If somebody is writing a story twenty years later about it, it might make a nice part of the story, but I was absolutely unhelpful. Our manager at the time, Peter Urban, which back in those days, you used your friends and they became either your drummer or your manager, because no one wanted to be in a punk rock band back in those days. Peter became our manager, and a year, maybe a year and a half later, we split from each other. This interviewer was like, do you remember why you and Peter Urban parted company? I said, no, I'm sure it was something stupid and silly. He said, why can't you remember, and I said I'm sure it was something stupid and silly. There was absolutely nothing at stake. I said, there was no money, no career opportunity, it wasn't like our movie deal with HBO folded. We were friends, and probably had some sort of friend fight, and if your friend is your manager, at the end of the friend fight you just go, that's it man, you're not our manager anymore. It was totally unimportant. I was a very dedicated punk rocker, but not like what you would call a dedicated musician or songwriter, it was just not important. To me, songs back then were like, you put together a cool chord change, a cool drum beat, and something you call a verse and something you can a chorus, and half of the times we wouldn't even write lyrics for these songs. You would just be up there yelling stuff during it and then when the chorus came, you yelled something a little more coherent. Later on, of course we started writing songs, and we always did have song songs, but a lot of our stuff was us getting up there and writing these song things, and we'd play them for two or three sets and then never play them again. I'll hear cassettes now of live stuff we did back then, and $^1/_3$ of the set is songs that I know were only around for 2-3 weeks, that we wrote, played awhile, and discarded not because they were crappy or anything, but because they weren't meant to last. It wasn't like I'm going to write a classic, or I'm going to write a song that is going to make the world sing. That's not what it was about.





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The early bands like the Screamers and Crime either didn't put out records at all, or put out such limited release records that they are gone now, whereas the machine bands bought records by X, the Dickies, and the Germs, so your inspiration came from actual performances and their inspiration came a great deal from product.

I know Crime put out some records, but you cannot find them now. I think the Screamers, well, Chip and I are working on a new record and we were just talking about the Screamers, but the Screamers were waiting for the deal that never came. Bands like the Dils, the Zeros and the Weirdos, who later released an album or two more or less after the fact, all had singles out, so there's still stuff out there from the original days, but the Screamers don't have any of that stuff because they were convinced that they were going to get a deal. That just was not the way to go in terms of any recorded legacy such as it is. In rock journalism cliché, people say that the Dils were criminally under-recorded. The thing to me is no, it was just about right. It just wasn't meant to be. That's not what it was about.

Ian MacKaye mentioned in our first issue that things tend to be over-documented now, so whereas before there was a genuine lack of it, now every band can release CDs, video, and even DVDs. Pearl Jam can release a huge catalog of live recordings, but who cares? It reminds me of the gluttony of stadium rock days when everyone was bootlegging Grateful Dead shows.

Frankly, over-documented is actually a critical assessment of something, because there are some things that can withstand the sort of documentation and scrutiny if it's there, if there's a lot to look at. It starts getting thin indeed for some people. I would say that Pearl Jam probably shouldn't be releasing a tremendous amount of live stuff, but if you look at the Ramones' world tour video, stuff like that is valuable and interesting. It all depends on what it is you are looking at. If there's a lot worth looking at, it's worth looking at, but if there's not a lot there to look at in the first place, it just doesn't need it. He's right.

The Dils' last show was with Black Flag at Blackie's, with Dez singing I believe. Did you realize at that point that machine bands were supplanting your generation?

Oh yeah. I knew that when bands like the Dead Kennedys came on strong in San Francisco, and here it starts getting intertwined in the personal. I had gotten really sick to death and bored with punk rock and the state of punk rock. I was an avid buyer at the time of import singles from England, like Eater and all that stuff. Then I started noticing that the quality was falling off really bad. I remember the last punk rock record I went out and bought and got excited about was Sham 69. After that, the songs that I wanted to play during the Dils were punk rock only in the sense that we were a punk rock band and we were doing them, because we were starting to write different kinds of songs. A style that would later go on to fit Rank and File.

Some of them would even be transformed into the Rank and File sets.

By that time, there was becoming a self-identified punk rock audience in cities like San Francisco and down in Los Angeles that basically wanted to see their punk rock. Damn it, we came to see punk rock, you're not punk rock, you're wearing a flannel shirt. You're not punk rock. You're playing a Buddy Holly song, you're not punk rock. You're playing a Johnny Cash song, you're not punk rock. That song you just played is mid-tempo. You're not punk rock, that song had a harmony in it. We actually had people start telling us yes, you're not punk rock. I knew before seeing shows like that one that the Dils' place in punk rock was gone because of the sense of what was happening. Al had already bailed on the Nuns for similar reasons, because the music just wasn't interesting to them anymore. The notes were still going, but Al Escovedo wasn't into them anymore.

El Vez (Robert Lopez) had bolted from the Zeros even before that.

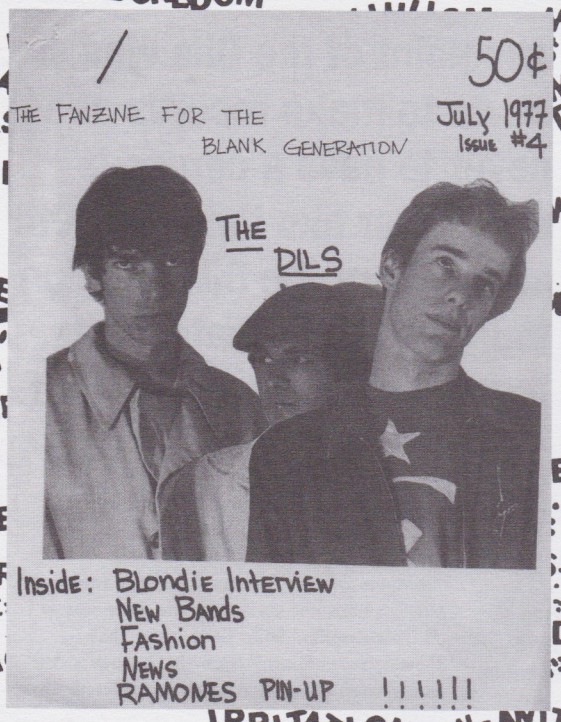
A lot of the original bands were fading and petering out. I know in fact that the Avengers were on the verge of breaking up, though I am not saying for the same reason I did, although it could be. I know that Penelope and Jimmy from the Avengers definitely went on to do something different than punk rock.

But Penelope has gone 360 degrees, and a few years ago put together a temporary Avengers line-up with a few new school kids and recorded some new punk rock songs.

Yeah, I don't think that's a very wise move, but that's her business. I knew that our place, or I should I say for me, the moment was over. It didn't even feel the same.

Right around the same time, Jello Biafra said that the Dils had broken up the scene over the Dirk Dirksen incident about the Gay Community gig.

See, Biafra was a suck ass. The original bands were all very independent minded and had a very independent spirit. Dirk Dirksen was not important to us. Rodney Bingenheimer was not important to us. The Mabuhay was not important to us. What was important to us was what we were doing and the music. I remember when we were getting together to do a show at the Gay Community Center. I don't remember if it was going to be a benefit or a regular show. What had happened was that it was going to be the Dils and the Avengers. At the time, the Dils were coming on strong, but the big bands in town were the Nuns and Crime. The Nuns could pack Mabuhay ten nights in a row. They were what kept Mabuhay going. They were the moneymakers for that club, and that's what clubs care about. When Dirksen got wind that we were going to be doing shows in different places, he said, anybody who plays some place else will never play here again. Now the Nuns were our buddies. When we told them that, basically Alejandro went to Dirksen and said, you ban these guys, we'll never play here again. Dirksen backed down. Biafra was one of the ones who walked around saying to the bands, you're going to wreck the scene, and you've got to work with





Dirk Dirksen. He was a complete suck ass. And then later Dirk returned the favor by promoting Jello's run for mayor, which is what made him a celebrity and made the Dead Kennedys a big band. It made him a celebrity in San Francisco, because it got him in all the papers and on TV. Punk rock musician Jello Biafra and his band the Dead Kennedys, who are outrageous, are playing Mabuhay this weekend. Jello, like the Dickies down in L.A., was the mainstream media's idea of what punk rock was. This guy's name is Jello Biafra, his band is named the Dead Kennedys, and he takes his pants off on stage, wow. So regardless of what you think of his records…Well, I always thought Jello was a stupid performer, I think his performances were stupid and I think his lyrics are stupid, but I always thought his band was good and made good-sounding records. The band and the music were good on the records. What Jello is and what he wanted to become, was like a fifth level celebrity nationally who gets on a talk show occasionally, does a lecture here and there, and is a San Francisco character, like Emperor Norton or Wavy Gravy or one of those guys. He's a San Francisco character, he'll get in the gossip columns, he'll do that silly suing thing with his band, and he's the First Amendment guy. Yeah, he's a First Amendment guy, but what was one of his first pivotal moments as a public personality? Trying to get bands not to place somewhere. To me, I'm sorry, I read your piece in your magazine with him, he's just a phony. I've always thought that guy was a phony and I'll believe it until the day I die.

Well, he was very difficult to interview and it took several times, like ten phone calls instead of the typical one or two, so I can sympathize a bit.

He's just a complete phony. He was very clever. This has a lot do with, well, I'm going to use a vague amorphous term loaded with potentially pompous sounding shit, but the "artistic community," and you can look at the punk rock community as an artistic community, but to try to find comfort in conformity among your peers and among your old neighborhood is always a really strong human tendency. For true rebels and independent thinkers, that's not something that is important to them. They're always looking for something else out of life or out of art or anything, any human endeavor. Something more than comfort, something more than, okay, here's my four walls, everything is groovy inside these walls so I never want to change. He's an example of somebody, and Tim Yohannon of *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* was an example of this too, because he was part of this whole thing of what happened in San Francisco. The guys needed to have punk rock become something that had a finite beginning, a finite end, you will go this far and no further, here's a list of what is punk rock, here's a list of what isn't. Please read the list, you are responsible, and ignorance is no excuse. We will actually decide who among us are and are not punk rock. That's what they were waiting for, and by the time 1980-1981 rolled around, because by 1979 that whole thing was coming on strong, but by the time 1980-81 came around it was there. Those guys had it. The Yohannons and Biafras of the world had it. That's why punk rock started to sound like it did, you know? That's why a lot of the color was gone, a lot of the flamboyance was gone, a lot of the creativity was gone. With the first wave of punk rock, not one band sounded alike. They all sounded different, and a year to a year and a half later when you'd go see a punk rock show, every band would sound the same. Maybe the one that was a bit better would be the one that got bigger or more popular than the other ones. Every band sounded the same. I remember there being these stupid debates when the first P.I.L record came out among these kind of people. Is this punk rock, man? I don't know. I don't think so. What's that? Because it didn't sound like some stupid SST record. There was just unbelievable fear and conformity, like shut it down, shut it down, we cannot handle this. Johnny Rotten used to be punk rocker, but he's not anymore. The whole mentality just got in there. That's why I just walked, even ran away from it as fast as I could. It was an ugly scene.

But it might seem to many people that the Dead Kennedys seemed to get their political message from bands like the Dils, like "I Hate the Rich," "Class War" etc. But then I found out how much you liked Bob Marley, and I thought, maybe Tony and Chip were getting their protest politics from Bob Marley records more than the *Communist Manifesto*.

One thing that I have always loved about reggae music is…Well, whatever the ins and outs of rasta, it's their thing, not mine, but it's a heartfelt thing, it's a heartfelt emotion and it's real. That always came across to me in a lot of my favorite reggae bands or performers. It's like getting back to thing about simple, direct communication. That kind of music has always appealed to me, like the way that real original blues appealed to me. I like directness and honesty in music, I mean I like other things in music, but that's like an attractive thing to me. I loved those Bob Marley and the Wailers records, and I saw them play down in San Diego. Now days, I feel privileged to have done that because he died way too early and his legend has only grown since then. It always amazes me when

I talk to people and tell them that I saw him, they're like, what, you saw Bob Marley, because there was like 2,500 people, and Little Anthony opened up for him, from Little Anthony and the Imperials, a Vegas act. They opened with "Philadelphia Freedom." And you could tell his whole band were totally pro Vegas black musicians dudes just doing their thing, and you could tell, the idea of them opening for Bob Marley was like, this is a drag, because back then, and it might even still be this way, a lot of blacks, especially musicians, are like, I take a shower three times a day and my clothes are the finest and I wear nice rings and take pride in my appearance, then there are these reggae dudes that smell bad. They were the black equivalent of hillbillies. They are country cousins. There was pot smoke everywhere and that's uncool. You could tell that they were not thrilled with the idea. I don't even know if Little Anthony knew who Bob Marley was. But that's an idea of where Bob Marley was at during that point of his career in America, that he could play San Diego, a several thousand seater, and get some Vegas act to open for him. I actually take that back, because for all I know, Little Anthony could have been one of Bob Marley's favorites when he was younger, because he loved American r&b. You listen to Bob Marley, and you're hearing Curtis Mayfield. So I take that back about them being foisted on Marley, Marley might have said, "Get me Little Anthony man." The political thing came about because when I was in college almost all my professors were Maoists. I was already leaning their way before I got to college, and when I got there it was pretty straight forward, there was no... Well, you're young and your mind is absorbing stuff, so by the time I got out of school, that's what I wanted to write about. That stuff was important to me, and of course there was the whole protest vibe and stuff like that. That combined with the sheer radicalism of punk rock, because my thing back then, and thinking about it now I would regard it as something an ignorant 19 or 20 year old would say, because that's what I think now, but then I would go around and say, man, you guys go around wearing swastikas, that's not going to scare anybody, why don't you wear a hammer and sickle, because that's what scares people. That's who this country is at war with. The red revolution and all that, so if you want to scare them, wear something that will scare them.

Did you know that the New York Dolls had used the communist flag as their backdrop for awhile?

Yeah, because of the whole red leather period. That was also one of the inspirations for it, because we had seen a picture of them in *Rock Scene* performing in their outfits with the big hammer and sickle and thought, that's cool. It was all mixed up. Nowadays, I don't find much time to write songs or sing songs about hating people and wanting wars, like "Hate the Rich" or "Class War." But back then, that was what I was totally into, so it wasn't just that, it was stuff like that New York Dolls thing. Just the whole flamboyance of it, the sort of in your face thing. We had some shows booked up and down the West Coast, and they said, do you have any pictures we can put on the flyers like at colleges, and we sent them one with Chip jumping up in the air with a hammer and sickle T-shirt and they cancelled the shows when they got the picture. They were like, nope, we can't have this.

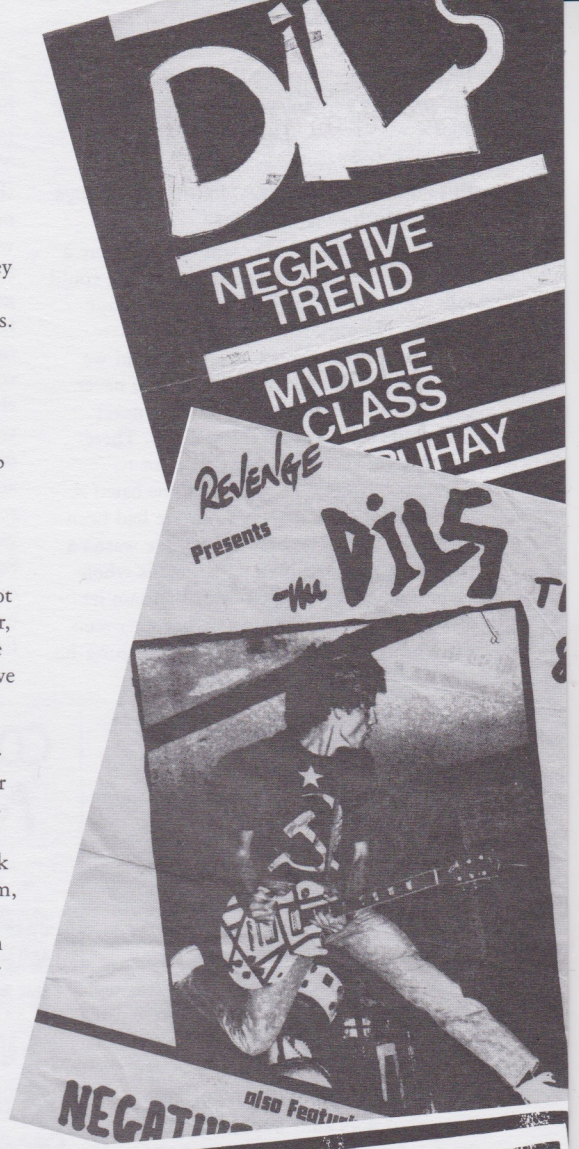
But serious-minded punk rock revolution aside, how did you end up in the Cheech and Chong film *Up in Smoke*?

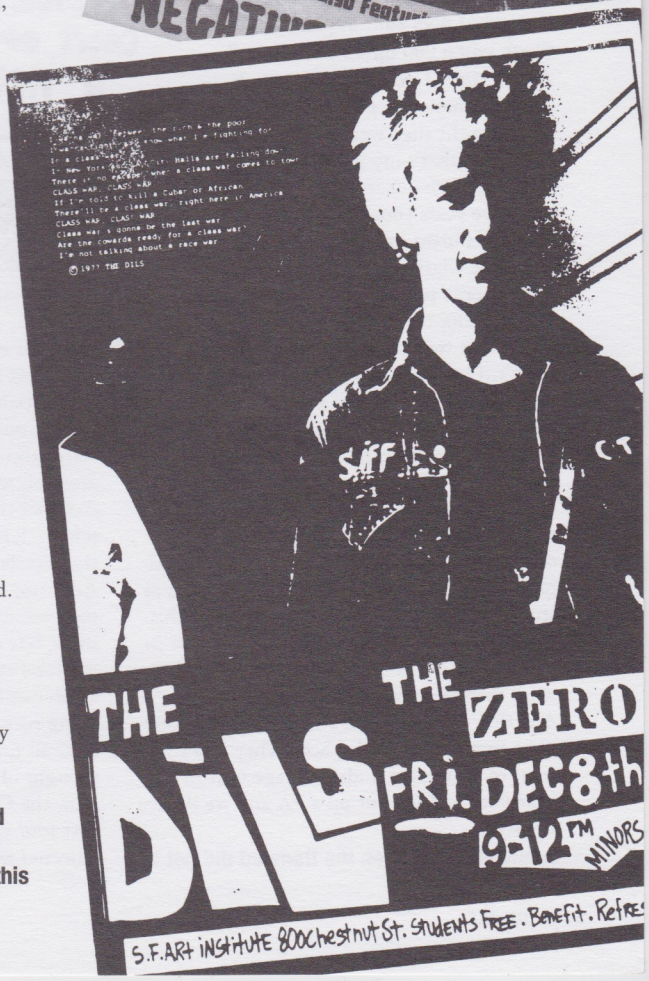
We were down in Carlsbad at the time. Chip and I were still living down there. Peter Urban, our manager, was living up in L.A., and at the time, you could not play the big nightclubs in L.A., because they were not booking punk rock bands. That film was shot at the Whisky or the Roxy, I can't remember, but it was filmed at one of those places. One of the big goals of all these bands was that we had to get into these nightclubs. We got to play some places with stages and P.A.s and stuff. All the bands wanted to do that. Peter heard, I think maybe Rodney on the radio or something, that punk rock bands were playing at some Cheech and Chong filming. There was a casting call for all the punk rock bands. If you look at the audience in the film, it's all like John Doe and Exene, and the whole punk rock scene from the time was in the audience. The Germs and all these other bands had signed up to be in the movie, we hadn't, we weren't there. Peter called up and said, get up here right now and see if we can't bust into this. What we did, we got my best friend from high school, Endre, to be our drummer because we couldn't find our drummer, and we bought him like a fifty dollar drum kit and he's the one that played on "I Hate the Rich." We came up to L.A., picked up Peter at his place, and he lived about five minutes from the club they were filming at. We pulled up to the side door where there was a line of bands waiting to get in. We pulled up to the door right when the assistant director or something leaned out the door and said, "Who's next?" and Peter jumped out of the car and said we are. We walked in there with our stuff, set up, played, and left, because we wanted to play a nightclub. Later we found out that out of all the bands, we were the ones they picked.

For the final cut?

Yeah, we weren't signed up for that or anything. It's truly a wild punk rock story, but that's exactly the way it happened.

Like Emmylou Harris, both you and Chip are army brats. How did your military veteran father take to all this





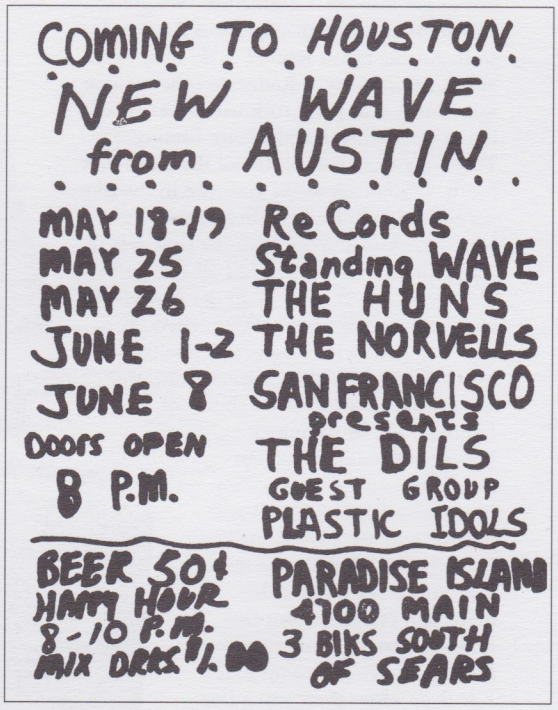
radicalism?
My dad was very tolerant, he didn't mind, of course we weren't living at home at the time.

But I'm sure he saw the picture of you guys with a hammer and sickle!
They way he looked at it was that we were a band and that's just what bands do. We could talk about anything. We could talk about politics. He was very tolerant and understanding, he was a very smart man and we could talk about all sorts of stuff. He never demanded that we be like him. He never encouraged us to go in the military. There was none of that stuff. My dad went to Vietnam and when he came back, he hated it there, he thought it was awful. He had been in World War II and Korea too. He wasn't a young guy. He had been a marine his whole life. When he came back from Vietnam he said it was the worst thing he had ever seen. Absolutely awful. So he was not like gung-ho charley.

Not an 18-year old, brainwashed kid.
Yeah. It was nothing like that. My point being that he didn't see anything wrong with what we were doing. He was supportive and thought it was great. He was thrilled. He always said it was the first time members of his family had ever gotten into the newspaper for something other than dying or getting married. We'd get write ups and send them the press and they'd be thrilled. They thought it was great.

Speaking of radicalism and promotion, what was your impression of the Clash when you opened for them?
At the time, I really like the Clash, I thought they were good, although I also thought they were a bit show bizzy, but that's my problem, not theirs. Let me put it this way, if I had been five years younger, if I had been like a freshman in high school that loved the Clash and was going to smoke some pot and drink some beer before going to the show, I would have thought it was an incredible rock show, but I wasn't. I was a punk rocker. I wanted to blow up the world with punk rock revolution, and I saw the Clash and thought they were really kind of show bizzy, plus the show the Dils played with them was at the Santa Monica Civic. It was a real rock show with real security, real back stage, real this that and the other. I didn't like that at all. We were used to playing punk rock clubs or rented halls or stuff like that, and I was thinking, isn't this what we are supposed to destroy? I wasn't in your face then, because I understood. This is what they were doing. They come to America, they come on a tour and they don't want to play rehearsal spaces. They don't want to play some dude's storage unit in Salt Lake City and I'll put up a PA and we'll have a party.

Funny enough, when the Damned did get to the West Coast, they had no money to get home. They ended up crashing at somebody's pad.
That was different. I saw the Damned when they first played out here, and they did play nightclubs. They played the Starwood and it was an incredible show. Actually, I know in a lot of histories of L.A. punk that show really gets mentioned. I think that show really ignited things. There were punk rock bands in L.A. kind of around, forming and doing stuff, but I think that show actually created the L.A. punk rock sensibility to tell you the truth. The Damned were not like the Clash or the Sex Pistols. The Pistols were like the anarchist fringe of it, the Clash were the socialist fringe of it, but the Damned did not give a shit about any of that stuff. Captain Sensible came on stage naked, Dave Vanian came on stage with road flares shaking them over the audience catching people's hair on fire. Them and the Ramones at the time were the most exciting shows I had ever seen in my life as far as sheer over-the-top, primal Little Richard style energy, but like a literal energy, not a machine energy like what we were talking about earlier. I think that their sense of, well, not who gives a shit, but the fact that they did not have "socially conscious" lyrics or an approach to things, unlike the Pistols and Clash at different ends of the spectrum, helped create the Los Angeles punk rock sensibilities. That was an incredible show, but their first tour was at a very different level than the Clash. By the time the Clash came here, they were on the verge of being rock stars. The Damned were not, they were an English band on tour. I never thought of it before, but the Sex Pistols' first tour, the Clash's first tour, and the Damned's first tour were all very different, but in ways, reflected who the bands really were and what stages they were in their career.



When the Jam first toured America, they opened for Blue Oyster Cult. The first wave of bands to hit the States came and toured under very different circumstances.
Another thing about the Clash, a friend of ours at the time, Claude Bessy, who wrote for *Slash*, got the shit kicked out of him by security backstage at the Clash show. The show created so many repercussions, but I remember at the time thinking, people expected too much of the Clash when they came out here. They thought they were like the deliverance, not the Second Coming, but the First Coming. This is the incarnation, "the only band that matters." Remember the quote? And when they played, the people that were like in the scene and on the fringes, kept thinking, oh, I can get backstage at the Clash show because I write for *Slash* and stuff like that. People that were more close to that, compared to people who just happened to buy the record and said, Oh, I like this…Is this what punk rock is? But fair enough, you need those people to fill the Santa Monica Civic. People in the scene and on the fringes of being the inner circle expected way too much from those guys. They expected the world to be turned upside down by the Clash being there. They expected the Santa Monica Civic to be cool. They expected the Clash to be cool, they expected no security. So Claude got the shit kicked out of him, not by the Clash' security but by the Santa Monica Civic security, and I'm sure he was drunk, he was probably acting "punk" backstage, and they had probably never seen anything like that before, and they probably said, you know what we do to drunk assholes backstage at the Santa Monica Civic? We kick their ass and throw them out- which is exactly what they did to him. "Claude got beat up at the Clash show and they didn't do anything about it!" people were saying, but the Clash didn't even know! But all of a sudden, it was their fault, and it became our fault too, because the ticket prices were like $10.00 for the show. We had big fights with promoters and it even turned into little magazine *Slash* and *Flipside* wars over ticket prices. It was the Clash's show, not ours, but we got blamed for the ticket prices, believe it or not. People were saying "The Dils man, c'mon man, it's $10." But whatever *(laughs)*. We just thought, we can't win, we just can't win. Bo Diddley opened the show.

Do you think it was an act of courage to bring Bo Diddley in front of that audience? I remember seeing *Cream* magazine overviews of the Pearl Harbor '79 Tour and scratching my head when it said he was included.
You know something, I have quite a different take on that. There's a long, historical tradition now for British bands to come over here and hire black opening acts. The Who had

the Toots and the Maytals open up for them and stuff like that. And I love Bo Diddley. To me, Bo Diddley is one of the gods. He is one of the untouchable icons of rock music. I didn't expect the Clash to have ten punk rock bands open up for them, but when they had Bo Diddley open up for them, that was a failure of the imagination. It's just like U2 having BB King open for them at Dodger Stadium. Now, I know U2 might be thinking, we want to introduce this great classic legend to our young stupid audience, there's 70,000 of them out there. This gives BB a chance to stretch his legs, but Bono came onstage and introduced BB King to his audience as somebody that we (U2) just recently discovered. Now, I know he didn't mean, we discovered this man, what he meant to say is that BB was a man U2 just recently got into. But you know the way it just sounded, right? I can imagine that BB was thinking, you know, I remember when Eric Clapton or Jeff Beck gave me the exact same intro at the Filmore in 1968. You know what, get me back to Vegas. To me, it was a similar thing to the Clash having Bo Diddley open up for them. I can dig it if Joe and Mick and the dudes just dug Bo, he happened to be their favorite performer, and they were just thrilled to have him play with them. Fair enough.

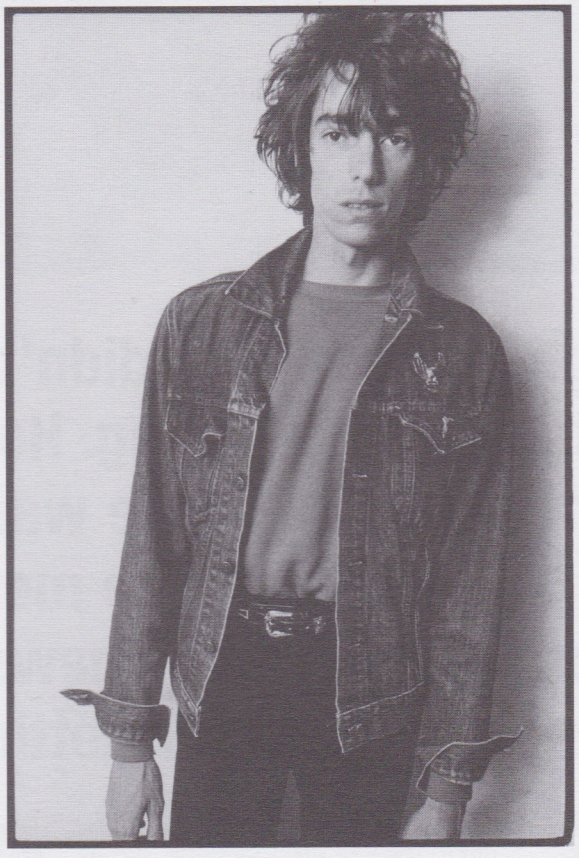
Was it a stab at roots and legitimacy?

I actually believe they thought that this is what English bands do. Because the Clash always wanted to be a classic English band. In fact, the Clash, of all the original punk bands, when I listen to their records, the Clash's first record has worn the least well to me. It's a total surprise. That first record of theirs- I worshipped that record. I wore two copies of that record out. I loved the sound of that record. When I listen to it now, I don't like the sound of it. There's a phoniness to it that I don't hear in *Never Mind the Bollocks*, the early Ramones' records, or even the first Damned record, *Neat Neat Neat*. Those records still sound as great to me as they ever did. I pick on the Clash now because it's like rock music. I think the Clash were the first punk band of stature, I'm sure there were other bands but none we are talking about 25 years later, that started the rock values coming back into punk rock, which is fair enough. The Clash weren't the saviors of anything, and they never claimed to be. A lot of people put that weight on them. That was my impression. I loved the show, I thought they were great, but it was a rock show.

So, it was the Who or Rolling Stones coming to America?

That was exactly what it was. When I went to see the Who at Anaheim Stadium, I knew I was going to get a big rock show. The several times I went and saw the Stones I knew I was going to get a state of the art, stadium rock, god rock show. When I went to see the Clash, I didn't want that from them. I wanted my punk rock! I didn't get it twice. I got a great band, because they were a great band, but as far as a great punk rock band, maybe they were better than that. Let's put it that way.

Every band sounded the same. I remember there being these stupid debates when the first P.I.L record came out among these kind of people.



Is this punk rock, man? I don't know. I don't think so. What's that? Because it didn't sound like some stupid SST record.

The liner notes and interviews included on some of the Dils' re-issues show that you loved David Bowie too, because he bucked trends and make atmospheric Brian Eno albums like *Low* when he could have been a disco superstar. Do those records, all the way up to *Scary Monsters*, still interest you?

Yeah. I think the whole *Low* period. To me, Eno yes, Bowie less so. I like Bowie, like *Ziggy Stardust* and all that stuff. I still think that "Rebel Rebel" is one of the best rock songs ever recorded, the sound of it and the sheer nonsensical passion of it. It's passion about nothing, but it sounds good. It's just a good record. It's hard for me to talk in any comprehensible way about it. Yeah, those records hold up largely because of Eno, not in the sense that those are great Eno records, because obviously it was a collaboration...Those Eno/Bowie records are an example of somebody working creatively to come up with something of real quality, at least to my ears. When I hear those records, they still sound as fresh and interesting as the time when I first heard them. In fact, startling so sometimes. Of all the records of those days, the records that look larger even than they did when I first heard them is the *...Bollocks* record by the Pistols, and the first Ramones' record. I loved both of those records when they came out, and when I hear them now they just seem to be even better to me.

But you disliked the second Ramones' album *Leave Home* because of the keyboards.

I always dug the Ramones, but to me that first album is the thing, I think because it is such a complete piece. They made other good records. I'm not a rock critic who says, well, after this...That's not what I am talking about. But that first album has sheer brilliance. That is the closest thing since rock became self-aware and "this is rock'n'roll music" happened in 1963 or 1958, when rock music became self-aware of itself as rock music. I'm not talking about the Louis Prima days or even Little Richard, because that was back in the days when the foundations were being laid, the form-givers were working and actually making it, they didn't have time to sit around and think about what it is. They were making it. After it got made, and became what it is, at whatever point that is, 1961 or whatever, the self-



My point being that [our Dad] didn't see anything wrong with what we were doing. He was supportive and thought it was great. He was thrilled. He always said it was the first time members of his family had ever gotten into the newspaper for something other than dying or getting married.

aware era of rock'n'roll, we are rock'n'rollers, we are rock'n'roll musicians, we play rock-'n'roll. We're a band, what we do is rock-'n'roll, in that era the first Ramones' album stands, if not the top, then close to the top, of the supreme artistic achievements. I think that album is that great.

"Beat on the Brat" is the equivalent of "Great Balls of Fire"?

Well, no, it is a different kind of thing. People like Jerry Lee are in another complete category. They are untouchable. Have you seen the *Shindig* videos that Rhino puts out? They have one that is Jerry Lee on *Shindig*, which is a show from 1964-66, definitely the British invasion period of the Byrds, Lovin' Spoonful and stuff, the mid-1960s era of rock'n'roll. But they had Jerry Lee on a lot, enough to out together a half-hour video of just his appearances. What's weird about it is that it's obviously after his marriage, after the whole scandal went down, and if you know anything about him, you know this is the beginning of a real low point for him in his career. It's right before he recorded his country records and had his comeback. He's basically playing little clubs for no money but he still was on TV and his performances are incredible, but you can tell that it's not his era, not his scene. He is driving the audience crazy, but it's not his scene. He's got his hair slicked back and he's not like some cute boy with bangs singing "All Day and All of the Night." He's like a nasty, sleazy looking dresser. He looks like he's clean, but has that southern, back-seat-of-the-car in a club parking lot in Louisiana look going on. He cannot wash that off. No matter what clothes he wears, he can't change that. He's always looked that way, and he's awesome, but you can tell, this is not his time, and his country thing has yet to come. He's delivering great rock music, but his world is over, that world is gone, that world of him on stage with Chuck Berry and they both have hits in the top ten and Elvis and all that stuff. It's simply not there. See, I put Jerry Lee in a different era. I would not compare the Ramones' album to what I consider the single greatest recorded moment of rock music history. Do you want me to tell you what it is?

To be continued in Issue 4...

A day in the night of the THE NEW BOMB TURKS

Strange though it may seem, the New Bomb Turks *have been making music for over ten years now. During the course of those ten years, the band has released roughly a million records on approximately one bazillion different labels. They've toured Europe twelve times. They've been to Japan, Australia, and even Canada. They've downed a whole lotta beers, and only lost one drummer along the way. After finding another drummer hiding in the corner of their apartment, the band quickly and quietly made one of the best LP of their career* (Nightmare Scenario). *They've been courted by major labels, been interviewed in Entertainment Weekly, and had videos featured on MTV. Not that any of that matters to us punk rockers, of course. Interview by Pat Dull.*

Recently, the band invited me along for some of their recording sessions at Workbook Studios in Columbus, Ohio. I ended up drinking a few beers with the band and, next thing I knew, I was singing backup on the title track from their upcoming album. Pretty cool. During all this, I was somehow able to conduct the following interview with Eric Davidson *(vocals),* Matt Reber *(bass), and* Sam Brown *(drums).*

So, what's the name of the new record you're working on?
Eric: It's probable going to be *The Night Before the Day The Earth Stood Still.*
Matt: No, it's definitely going to be called that!

How many songs have you recorded here at Workbook Studios?
Eric: Sixteen or seventeen, I think.

How will they be released?
Eric: We're going to be like Moby, and use each song for a different commercial! *(laughter, Eric sings: "People, they come together!")* Actually, they will be used for an album, and probably also a single.
Matt: I'm not even saying single, I would say album, and hopefully use any extra songs for something else.
Sam: And then, sometime after that, world domination! *(laughter)*
Matt: But the album is the first thing. *(laughter)*
Eric: We'll have 12 to 13 songs on the record, and hopefully have a few songs left over to use for something else. Every album we do, we try to have a couple songs left over, to use them for a single or whatever.

Any cover songs?
Eric: We had a cover of a Faron Young song called *Live Fast, Love Hard, Die Young*, that we were going to do, but we decided not to. We still might do that.

Do you have a deal worked out with a record label?
Matt: We've got some things lined up, but we're actually label-less right now. The new record was going to come out on our friend's label called Overcoat, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen now, so we're looking into other labels.

All photos by Pat Dull



The Night *Before* the Day The Earth Stood *Still*

Wasn't there going to be a 10-inch record out on a local Columbus label?
Matt: Yeah, we were going to put it out on Glazed Records here in Columbus, but he's no longer able to do it, for lots of reasons, so it's now going to come out on Gearhead Records.

Is that 10-inch record going to consist of songs you're working on here today?
Matt: No, those are songs we recorded last fall. We recorded five songs, four of which are gonna be on the 10-inch on Gearhead.

What will that record be called?
Matt: It's called the *Rocket Widget* EP. *(laughter)*

Any idea what label will be releasing the new LP?
Matt: Nothing definite yet.

After these obligatory "new recordings" questions, the discussion turned to a mutual friend who had recently moved out to California, Stephanie Booher. In addition to doing her own work, Stephanie is also helping Jello Biafra with some of his activities. Coincidentally, Eric and Jello had spoken on the telephone just the night before.

What did Jello have to say last night?
Eric: He's a really good guy. The whole legal problems with the Dead Kennedys is just really depressing for him, and then we talked about music. It's interesting, 'cause he hasn't let his life turn into the Lenny Bruce thing, where he just reads from his court transcripts during his spoken word performances.
Matt: He's totally active, active in politics.
Eric: I think he has a legitimate beef about his label. He doesn't even have fucking rights to goddamn *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables,* and that fucking sucks. Alternative Tentacles has done a lot of cool shit, and the fact that he can't even put out the records that he did with his own band totally sucks.

Did you talk about maybe putting a New Bomb Turks record out on Alternative Tentacles?
Eric: I don't really think he would like our shit. I think he likes the faster stuff. It sounds like he's busy enough as it is, and he has enough legal shit going on…

He doesn't need to worry about you guys suing him, too! *(laughter)*
Eric: No! *(laughter)* He asked me to send him a tape, though, so he could hear what we're doing. He did mention that when the "new" Dead Kennedys played in Austin, Texas, with the guy from *Courtship of Eddie's Father* singing [instead of Jello], people were throwing Jello Shots at the stage! Hilarious!
Sam: Oh yeah, I'm sure that guy is a lot better than Jello! *(laughter)*
Matt: And none of those leftist politics messing up the songs. *(laughter)*

Do you consider the New Bomb Turks to be a political band at all?
Matt: We're political individuals. We're not

political like Rage Against the Machine. I like to think that just the fact that you're in a rock band is a political statement, in that you're not doing what people normally expect you to be doing.
Eric: I can't imagine being a big as Bono and thinking "Wow, there's a shitload of people that put import into what we have to say." When you're not that big, I think it sounds a little cheesy.
Matt: Well, yes and no. I mean, look at a band like Fugazi. Everything they do is political, they've been successful, and it's not like they get out there and preach politics. It's a way of being politically active, but that's not the only driving force to the band.
Eric: America's gotten so consumerist that if you simply don't eat at McDonald's anymore, people look at you like you're some sort of fucking freak. So it's not very hard to be political in a way. If you come out and say you support anything even vaguely leftists, you're pigeonholed.
Matt: Especially now.

In their real lives, both Eric and Matt work in bookstores and, perhaps by default, are two extremely well-read cats (and not just on the latest Oprah of the Month and Left Behind tomes).

Eric: For this record, I really wanted to say something with the lyrics. I'm reading this incredible book called *One Market Under God,* and I really want to say something about "the market," and that you don't have to feel like you're within a market and that you have to always buy things. But how do you say all of that, constructively and intelligently, within a 2-fi minute punk rock song?
Matt: That *One Market Under God,* by Thomas Frank, he wrote a whole book about the free-market society and economy, it came out a year ago, and it's already out of date. So when you talk about writing a song…
Eric: Not only that, but fitting those ideas cohesively into a song. Even for the right-wing, if Newt Gingrich had to fit his "Contract With America" into a 2-1 minute rock'n'roll song, it would sound silly. That's why The Clash were so great, because they could make it metaphorical. People used to bitch about Joe Strummer's lyrics, but in a sense it's better to be poetic because you're not going to fit a cohesive political agenda into even a 25-minute song.

I read an interview with Bob Dylan where, in a rare moment of candor, he was saying something along the lines of not writing about crystal-clear specific issues, but write in ambiguities that still address issues.
Matt: Because otherwise you end up like Neil Young with "Let's Roll."
Sam: Exactly. That's one of the most embarrassing songs I've ever heard.
Eric: It's terrible, but Neil Young has lived his life making music, making art, doing what he wants, and surviving. Anybody who can do that is commendable.

Here's a silly question: is rock'n'roll art?
Eric: That's a silly question! *(laughs)* I think it's art. Everything you do is your art. There are people who come into where I fucking work and buy "Jesus as C.E.O." books. They think that management theory is artistic. It's like all those fucking Machiavelli business books that come out. These people think they are tapping into something that is greater than their everyday world.

Why do you say "fucking Machiavelli business books," like it's a bad thing?
Eric: There are these business books that are based on Machiavelli, or based on "Jesus' management style." The idea is that you take these people who did things artistically as an individual, and then you co-opt their life as "Aren't they great C.E.O.'s?"
Matt: It's "Machiavelli as C.E.O."; "Jesus as C.E.O."
Eric: "Hitler as C.E.O." *(laughter)*



"Winnie the Pooh as C.E.O." *(laughter)*
Sam: "Don Bovee as C.E.O." *(laughter)* [Don Bovee is a legendary Columbus character who goes to all the rock shows in town and gets every band to play "Batman" so that he can sing it with them]
Eric: "Don B. as C.E.O.!" I'd buy that book! He's the perfect C.E.O.; He gets people to do what he wants them to do, and they don't get paid for it! *(laughter)*

For those keeping track of history, the very first NBT recording was a split single with fellow Columbus band Gaunt. This fact is only one link of the twisting incestuous New Bomb Turks/ Gaunt chain; to further complicate matters, Turks guitarist Jim Weber was originally a guitarist for Gaunt. In fact, he was a member of both bands at the time of that first split single.
To further mix up the pot, Sam was the drummer for Gaunt immediately prior to joining the Turks, back in 1999.

Sam, how did you join Gaunt?
Sam: Jerry [Wick, singer of Gaunt] saw me playing in a band called V-3, and asked me to join Gaunt.

How did that turn into a gig with the Turks?
Sam: I think it was that the Turks had booked a show, and Bill [Randt, previous Turks drummer] was out of town and couldn't make it. Jim asked me if I could play 4 or 5 songs with the band. I took the record home that afternoon, and learned the songs as best I could. For me it was yet another Columbus band I've played with. I was collecting them! *(laughter)*

Collect the whole set! *(laughter)*
Sam: Yeah! Then Matt called and asked if I would help them record an album, and at that point I wasn't sure what was going on with Gaunt because we hadn't played for about two months. I'd call Jerry about every week, because I really wanted Gaunt to still be a band, but he was too busy doing whatever. So I ended up recording with the Turks on *Nightmare Scenario.* "Killer's Kiss" was the first new song that we ever played together.
Eric: I remember practicing once with Sam, and he said that he hadn't heard from Jerry for like a month. I think both bands at that point were just hanging out and playing local shows.
Sam: So it wasn't like I "jumped ship" from Gaunt to the Turks. It's like the ship was sinking, and these guys threw me the life-preserver. *(laughter)*
Eric: Which we kept pulling back before he reached it! *(laughter)*
Sam: I didn't mean to full-on join the band. I'm glad I did, 'cause it's been really awesome, but I was just going to help them make a record, and I was hoping that Jerry would come around and be Gaunt again.
Matt: We had told Jerry, if you need Sam, you've got him. We were willing to back off.
Sam: Yeah, Jerry had "rights" to me! *(laughter)*

Did you get "hazed" as the new member of the band?
Sam: Oh yeah!
Eric: Let me just say that Sam has the tightest ass I've ever seen! *(laughter)*
Sam: I used to! *(laughter)*
Matt: I was third, and it wasn't so tight by then! *(laughter)*
Sam: There's a sharp contrast between my 1999 ass and my 2002 ass. *(much laughter)*
Eric: But this whole Sam/Gaunt thing is sort of a microcosm of how bands in Columbus work and deal with each other. I can only imagine what bands in New York or L.A. must go through. Here, we all know each other; Sam fills in this show, I fill in that show…
Matt: I can honestly say that if it wasn't for Sam, it would have been the end of the band. Literally, Jim and I were talking, and it was either Sam or nobody. "If it's not Sam, then fuck it."

*The last three records by the Turks (*Scared Straight, At Rope's End, *and* Nightmare Scenario*) were released on Epitaph Records. At the time, some of the more orthodox members of the punk rock community were all pissy because the Turks had signed a record deal with Epitaph. After Nightmare Scenario was released, the band's contract was over, essentially leaving them without a label to release their music.*

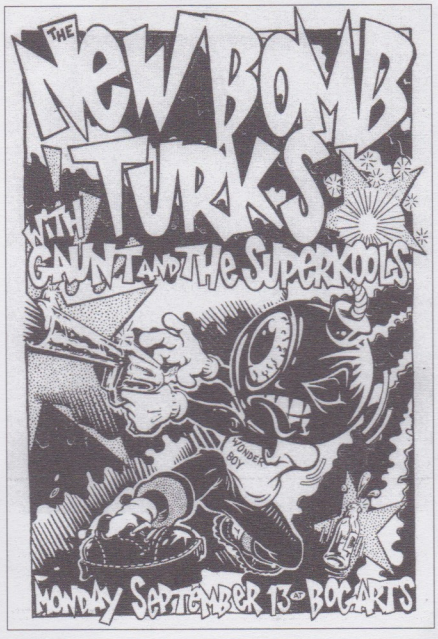
What happened at Epitaph?
Eric: Well, long story short, they did just about everything they said they would do. They gave us a decent advance that we would not have gotten from any other label…

Matt: They gave us a "major label" advance…
Eric: …and they admitted that maybe they could have done some things differently, in retrospect. The fact is, they know what they know, which is "pop punk west coast skateboard" stuff. That's fine, but that's not really what we're about. Plus, there were a lot of personal problems that Brett Gurewitz was going through at the time, which he was very honest and open to us about. He's a nice guy.
Matt: He's a real business man. But when our first Epitaph record came out *{Scared Straight},* there were people with the label that worked with us, and they were very into the band, and just very into music in general. Then, between *Scared Straight* and *At Rope's End,* there were some internal problems at Epitaph that resulted in new people getting assigned that weren't as close to the band or the kind of music that we were doing. By the time *Nightmare Scenario* came out, we were on a third team, and these guys were from major labels that had no idea about us or our music. Which is terrible, because that was probably the best record we could have made for the label.
Eric: For me, that's my favorite record.
Matt: Yeah, definitely.
Eric: Also, by that time, they had already dropped the bands that they were trying to group together, more garage-type bands like The Humpers, Red Aunts, Cramps, and Gas Huffer.
Matt: By that time, we might as well have been on Warner Brothers, because the people that had signed us, like Brett Gurewitz and others who were fans of the band, were out of the picture. And that's very important.
Eric: We never expected to sell like a million copies or whatever. Basically, it was a three-record deal, they paid the advances, they put out three records, they sent out promos, and now it's over.
Matt: The final phone call I got, as they were telling me that they were not going to renew the contract, was that he was really saddened, told me that *Nightmare Scenario* was the best record we ever did, on an aesthetic level he respected it, but there was nothing he could do.

Being aware that Left of the Dial HQ in located in Texas, I decided to fire a few Tex-centric questions at the band.

Any specific comments about Texas?
Eric: Austin is one of our favorite towns. We recorded our second record there *{Information Highway Revisited},* with Mike Mariconda, at Bismeaux Studios…
Matt: …which was owned by one of the guys from Asleep At The Wheel. That was cool.
Eric: Another thing about Austin, for all the stupid things I've ever done on stage, the only time I've actually knocked my ass out was in Austin…
Matt: …oohh, this is a bad story…
Eric: We were touring with Teengenerate, and we were playing the outside room at Emo's. We just got done playing, and we were backstage watching Teengenerate. So I got all hammered, and I was behind the stage with the singer from The Motards, and he was like, "C'mon, let's go stage-dive!" And I say "no, that's stupid, I'm not going to do that." He's like, "No, let's go do it!" So I jumped off and I remember leaping into the air, and it's the last thing I remember. I must have landed on my head, on the cement.
Matt: This is sick; I felt his head hit the floor, in my *feet!* It was the scariest thing I ever felt.
Eric: When I came to, I was talking to the ambulance driver. I was talking *as I was regaining consciousness!*
Matt: I had a ten-minute conversation with Eric, like "Are you O.K.?", and he kept saying "I'm O.K., I'm O.K." and he didn't remember any of it. It was the scariest thing.
Eric: Then we went to a party afterwards, at which we were accused of trying to steal the girlfriends of this band called The Satans! I'm like "Steal your girlfriend? I'm lucky that I'm able to just stand here!" *(laughter)*

So wait, you have a concussion, and you're still making a play for the ladies? *(laughter)*
Matt: Yeah! *(laughter)* Eric was actually making out with the chick! *(laughter)*
Sam: Could you pick a worse girl to make out



with than the girlfriend of a band called The Satans? *(laughter)*
Matt: You were making out with the girl, and The Satans were talking to Jim and saying, "Man, you guys think you can just roll into town, and steal our girlfriends…" *(much laughter)*
Eric: "I was like "Dude, I just conked myself on the head…can't I just kiss a girl?!?" *(laughter)*
Matt: And I'm like, "Look, I've got a girlfriend at home, I'm here talking to my friend Mike Mariconda, I could care less about your 16-year-old girlfriend!" *(laughter)*

Any other Texas stories?
Sam: I remember Cathy Cowgirl in Houston. We had just finished recording *Nightmare Scenario* in 2000, and we were playing in Houston. The last time I had been there was with Gaunt, and we met Cathy Cowgirl. She's sort of like the Beatle Bob of Houston, she's at every show. She has this amazing collection of strange stuff, like paintings by John Wayne Gacy…
Eric: …a frozen dog with two heads…
Sam: …and above her stove in the kitchen she has like 25 different Pillsbury Doughboy figurines, stuff like that.
Eric: …a Betty Page painting signed by Hugh Hefner…
Sam: …so my point is that it was really fun to be back in Houston again, and to see her, and to be there with the Turks. It was a huge crowd, and I'm thinking "This is gonna be great!" But about five songs into the set, Eric drops out, and I'm wondering what the fuck's going on. Jim throws his guitar down, and jumps straight into the fucking audience. Then Matt throws his bass down, and I was the only one left playing. My sunglasses were all steamed up so I couldn't really see what was happening.
Matt: What happened was these rockabilly guys, who are called Butterheads because they grease their hair back, had punched Eric in the face because Eric had messed their hair up or something.

You had it coming, then! *(laughter)*
Sam: The friends of the Butterheads, their defense for punching Eric was "You don't mess with a Butterhead's hair, man." *(laughter)* Get back in your time-machine, dude! *(laughter)*
Matt: The thing is, they're Nazi skinheads.

With hair?
Matt: They grow their hair out! *(laughter)*

Wow! That's subversive. You can't tell that they're skinheads, 'cause they have hair!
Eric: After I got decked, we went out and did about five more songs.
Matt: The rest of the night was me trying to talk myself out of trying to fight all these Butterhead guys. The best thing about our Houston experience was Cathy Cowgirl. She is fucking awesome. Shoutouts to Cathy Cowgirl, Molly Ivan, and Jim Hightower!
Eric: And Mike Mariconda.
Matt: And George W. can fucking suck it. *(laughter)*

After all this talk about fighting and kissing in Texas, the band was getting ready to put some finishing touches on one of their new songs. Somehow, due to a gross lapse in studio security, I was able to sneak my drunken pipes onto the background vocals for the title track of the Turks' upcoming LP, "The Night Before the Day the Earth Stood Still." In the near future, be on the Lookout for two new Turks releases,
The Night Before the Day The Earth Stood Still *and* Rocket Widget, *at a record store near you!*


AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
ELVEZ

Last year you had the El Vez for Prez tour, which was an attempt to get out the vote.
Yeah, and I didn't win.

Governor Bush did become president, but has it been as bad as you thought?
Well, there's been a bad turn of events, not that it's his fault or anything. I think it was still too early to tell before September changed everything. The scary things about the environmental issues perturbed me a bit.

Like opening the Alaska Range to drilling?
Yes, those kinds of things.

Do feel the progress he made with President Fox of Mexico about amnesty for immigrant workers and other border issues have now been pushed aside?
The borders things have been really closed now idea wise. There's differences, because we go from here to Canada all the time touring, it's a new thing. Any progress has been laid aside for a later date.

Is it going to be tough for people to keep those issues alive?
Yes, I think it will be a struggle, most definitely. Something like this makes times more conservative, and it makes people more conservative, like let's keep ours to ourselves kind of attitude.

You were about to do a X-Mas special for Canadian TV recently?
There were these producer workers out of Vancouver working on it. We filmed some of it in London last Christmas and worked on scripts and were pitching ideas. They were really close, but it didn't happen. That's show biz. You get close sometimes, but things like that happen all the time.

While you were in Europe, you got to meet Joe Strummer from the Clash.
Yeah, he was going to be part of the thing. They had asked him to be on it, and he said yes. He's a very nice guy.

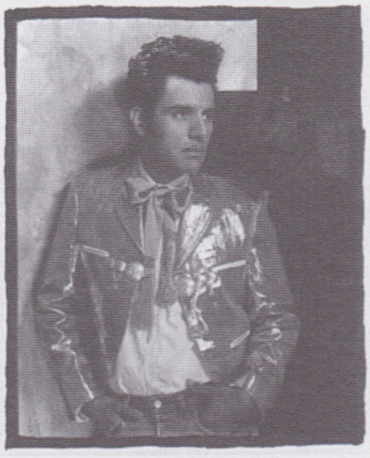
Why was it so special for you to meet him?
Meeting your punk rock hero over regular dinner, drinks and fun. I think he's a great guy. I've always loved his music. It's the first time I ever met him. We have mutual friends, but we had never met. It was just fun. It was a full night as opposed to, oh, it's nice to meet you, on to the next person. We became friends enough that we could tease each other at the end of the night.

When you were in the Zeros during the late 1970s the Clash were an important band to you?
Oh yeah. I left the Zeros in the later half of 1978, and they played with them not long afterwards. I was very jealous.

The Zeros' single "Wild Weekend" is in the music museum in Seattle?
Actually, it's the first one. "Wild Weekend" is actually the second single. "Don't Push Me Around" and "Wimp" are the first single and it is at the Seattle museum. I saw it last time I was there behind plexiglass. You push a little button and you can hear it.

Do they have any El Vez stuff there?
No, not yet. They'll have to enlarge their Elvis impersonator section.

Did you play that Sept. 30th show at the Shakedown in Las Vegas with the Zeros?
No. Javier cancelled it because I took Victor, who is the bass player for the Zeros, on the El Vez tour. So that left two Zeros in California. Our plan was to fly out and meet them. But Javier didn't want to do the shows unless they could rehearse with the bass also. It got cancelled. It was the second time they cancelled one of those shows.



Maybe next year?
I would like to, but I don't know if they'll ask us back after canceling the other shows. Hopefully they'll ask us back but we've cancelled twice already. Maybe the third times a charm.

Did punk mean something different to young Chicanos in the late '70s to bands like the Plugz, the Nuns, and Zeros than it did for the people in the Bags, the Dils, or the Weirdos?
That was the nice thing about being in that period, because it didn't break down into girl bands, guy bands, and Chicano bands. We've felt a part of the scene, the music scene, punk rock in whatever forms it was, like deadbeats, or weird things, or non-guitar bands like the Screamers. You just felt part of a movement of the scene, rather than saying we're Chicanos and we feel this way, or those are girls, and they feel this way. You felt like part of, yeah, this is all music that we like, this is all music that is different than what we hear on the radio or see on TV. So it wasn't broken down into… Well, being Chicano wasn't even a focal point or focus of the band, it was like, we're another band. I think people maybe pointed at the fact that we were younger than anyone else. It was a kind of nice thing, because it didn't matter that we were Latinos, it was just that we were a band. It gave us a whole part of the scene, rather than having to feel we're "this."

What led you to the political perspective that comes out on *Graciasland*?
Um, when you are young you are moving on the energy of youth and as you develop more ideas you have more things you want to say in certain ways. I think that getting the agenda out is more my call now with El Vez. Just to get issues across or keep people more aware, especially in these times when things are in a conservative cycle back again, ideas like border issues and other things that are swept under the table unless you are the thorn in the side, or the thorn underneath the rose, or whatever you want to be. You have to be the agitator and bring it up again. I choose to verbalize it in songs.

Can you see yourself making music without those messages?
Oh yeah. Definitely. I have a country and western band called Trailer Park Cassanovas. We're working on our third album, and we toured Finland last year. It's all original material, but it's bluegrass and roots kind of stuff. There's no real issues that are brought up at all.

How did you end up in Finland?
There's a big rockabilly convention that they have there. We're kind of blown out bluegrass, which kind of fits under the alternative country rockabilly scene. They had this great three day festival that is on the longest day. I forget what it is, the summer equinox I believe. It's held way up north, a couple of hours north of Helsinki even. Some bands liked us, so they had us flown out there and paid our way. It was a nice experience. It was really weird being there because Finland is nice, they have a socialized medical system and people are pretty much set, and there's not really any people of color at all there. But at this rockabilly fest, when I first got there I saw the rebel flags and stuff like that and usually you say, okay, they are young rockabilly kids. When they think of rebel flags they think of the South, and when they think of the South they think of Memphis, and when they think of Memphis they think of Elvis, so it just goes with that territory. But then slowly I began to notice things. There was one kid who had come like five hours from the Lapland area who was helping us out. He was a fan and all that stuff. He was wearing little bib overalls, and I saw a little peak on the top of the T-shirt, then later when he bent down I could see it was a Klu Klux Klan T-shirt. Later I saw kids with these terrible T-shirts that said things like

"Watch Out Nigger, Finland Klan is Getting Bigger" and then another kid with a picture of Hitler's sidemen. I was really put off by all this and ended up staying at the hotel most of the time. The other band members were hanging around the big field where all the kids parked their 1950s cars and stayed in tents. They said the kids were doing the equivalent of "We Are the Mods," but only white supremacist versions of the song. It was really sad and disturbing. We had a song about another thing, but when we played I addressed it a little bit but I didn't want to turn this band into something political, but when things happen you need to address them and make comments, even slip them under the table. So maybe I will always say what's on my mind, but I can write a love song too, or a song about dancing, or a song about the stupidity of racism.

How did you end up playing at Le Mons auto race in France? Better, how did the Audi car company decided they wanted El Vez to play?

They had a commercial on that season with a Natasha Kinski type of woman in a car. And an Elvis impersonator's car breaks down and he had this wiggly Elvis car stick on the windshield mirror. Every time he would switch his gears, the Elvis would wiggle. He was having a good time. But then his car broke down and when he's picked up by the woman in the brand new Audi S42, shifting gears is so smooth the Elvis doesn't jiggle. You know, the little toy Elvis. So she had to push it with her fingers. It was a big, popular commercial, so they had to have an Elvis impersonator. One of the organizers said I know a great Elvis impersonator in Los Angeles named El Vez, and one of the head Audi people said, you mean El Vez, the Mexican Elvis? Bring him over, we love him. We do pretty well in Germany, so we have a pretty big fan base there. It payed off. They paid for a nice trip to France again and we got to see the races. It was good.

Tell us about "Around the World in Eighty Minutes," your stand-up show that will be touring campuses this spring.

It's based around "Around the World in 80 Days," only I couldn't do it that long, so I did eighty minutes. It's monologues and a little bit of music, but it's like my travels and my tours. It's like tour memoirs almost, and my view of the world through El Vez, with political, spiritual, sexual commentary, whatever. In each area I make comments and say stories or sing songs that remind me of this or that. It went over really well. We did three nights. We have a woman who's interested in taking it to New York Off-Broadway, like Hedwig originally started and making a bigger production. And I already have offers from colleges to do it the spring of 2002, so after this tour I am going to start working on that again so I can take it on the road to colleges. It's pretty good, kind of like an El Vez show with less music and more talking and fuller ideas. We have slide projections and movies behind me and all this kind of stuff. It's very nice.

Do you find labels like "revolutionary chic" and "king of camp" demeaning?

I think they're fun. I mean I am not an impersonator, but I like the term, because I'm more like a translator, so it's not like a full-on impersonation of Elvis. Names are just a way of helping you get a grip on something, but when you see the show, or listen to it, people say, this is completely not what I thought it would be like. I don't mind labels, because I always think I break them. So it doesn't bother me.

You've said, "I superimpose my culture and heritage over American icons because that's what America is about."

Well, it's the Statue of Liberty, "bring me your homeless, your tired and weary" melting pot kind of idea. What is America? Is it apple pie? It can be tamale pie too. The idea is that America is sauerkraut, America is sopapillas, America is chopped suey, America is all these different things because America is based on the idea of immigration and people from other lands coming to this land to mix it all up together and establish themselves with other cultures, so to be of a different culture is an American thing. The whole thing of Elvis as an icon is pretty Amer`ican, and I superimpose on it and put a moustache on it, but it could be easily become a black one, or a pan-Asian idea of what it could be. Like taking those cultural ideas and applying it this American pie Elvis and say this is what America is about too.

Like the playwright Luis Valdez ("Los Vendidos"), who exaggerates stereotypes of pachucos, Americanized Mexican-American college students, and hard working immigrant laborers, are you doing the same thing by deflating and exposing such stereotypes ?

I mean El Vez is an extreme of how Mexican I can be. It's overblown, and it's also an idea of an Elvis. No one really takes an Elvis impersonator very seriously. They're almost American court jesters. The idea of making it a Mexican one with charro, style and flash is to guild that lily even more. But to have words of truth, of revolution, safe sex, and Latino heroes coming through that messenger is to completely confuse the issue and enhance the issue at the same time. So I think that taking stereotypes… Well, I think there's stereotypes of every culture and I think that's fine. When I see the chihuahua commercial for Taco Bell or Speedy Gonzalez, I don't think that's how people view me. Because sure there's Mexicans with accents, and sure there might be lazy Mexicans, but there's lazy white people, there's lazy black people, there's lazy everybody. There's fast-talking Mexicans, there's fast-talking Japanese, there's fast-talking black people. Every culture can be stereotyped, but it does not mean that every person is that way. I, for one, don't think that way, and think it includes all the people. Stereotypes can be used for humor sometimes, and I super blow them up, and then empower them with knowledge and strength and issues that can be addressed.

When you've questioned the use of brown shirts by the Brown Berets or the stylized black eagle for the UTW, has it gotten you some flack in the Hispanic community?

No, but I wouldn't mind it. I think debating ideas, even things you might hold near and dear, is a good thing. You shouldn't take anything just on face value. Things can be questioned and analyzed and changed or stay the same. You can look at things many different ways. What I like to do…Well, when I had different shows, like the Gospel Show, or the Rock'n'Revolution or El Vez for Prez I'm not really running for president or trying to be a spiritual leader. I don't have a political manifesto, but I'm trying to open the door for debate or trying to get you to think about it or say here's a possibility. I'm not saying this is the end all, be all, and this is the way you should see God. Or this is the end all, be all, the correct political way things should go. I just want people to think. I want people to laugh, because when you are smiling or laughing you are more open to different views and ideas. The idea of taking something you know, like Elvis, and saying, how about look at things this way, it's like turning it upside down and putting a mous-

Because sure there's Mexicans with accents, and sure there might be lazy Mexicans, but there's lazy white people, there's lazy black people, there's lazy everybody. There's fast-talking Mexicans, there's fast-talking Japanese, there's fast-talking black people. Every culture can be stereotyped, but it does not mean that every person is that way.



tache on it. It's still that Elvis idea, but here's a new point of view of it. Here's someone else's point of view. I think the music can make them think, but at the same time it is entertainment and can make them happy.

What is it about the Strokes and the White Stripes that you like?

Well, sorry to say, but it's nostalgic because they remind me of good stuff. The Strokes remind me of New York, 1978, Blondie, Television, some Iggy in there and the White Stripes remind me of everything from 1974, Jimmy Page to Howlin Wolf to the Cramps to the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. I like nostalgia a lot. It's a kind of comfort. I like when it's thrown around and comes out in new ways.

You are totally responsible for the total sound collage of your music?

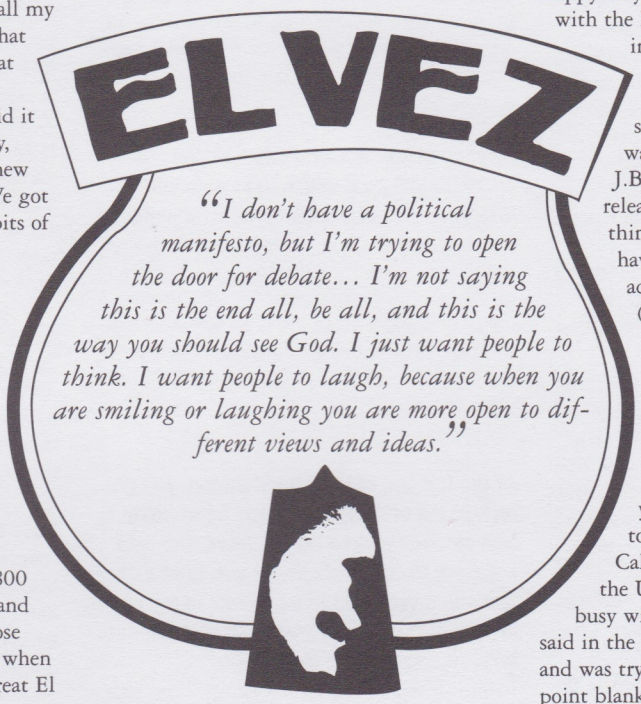
All the live albums, all the shows, all the arrangements are all done by me. It's all my musical history and the little things that meant something to me, or sounds that I like. It's like DJs now who use little bits of everything they like, but we did it with live musicians, so it's sadly to say, very nostalgic, but I'm not closed to new things. Sometimes it becomes new. We got some new songs in this show. Using bits of other pieces can turn into something new. Even Picasso took bits from African masks or other things that he saw. That's part of the creative process I think. Take things from the past and make them totally new, but the ideas come from other bits.

You were the first person in California to be presented the Elvis stamp?

Yes, I was. I had made an El Vez stamp. This company had made a 1-800 number where you could call El Vez and get the information. It was one of those recorded messages, one of those 976s when they first started. They made these great El Vez stamps that looked just like the young Elvis stamps except they put the Mexican flag behind me. It was the same pose in the photograph. They were really great. I was at the Hollywood Library Post Office in downtown Hollywood and the postmaster general of California presented me with the first sheet of Elvis and I presented him with the first sheet of El Vez. They had these great big giant cakes with a peanut butter and banana center. One was a Elvis stamp, and the other the El Vez stamp. We sang some songs. It was a fun day.

What happened to the German film you once described as a "Faust-Phantom of Paradise-Chiapas Revolutionary Fantasy"?

It's one of those show biz things where things come up (*laughs*). I have been close to many great things. It was really nice, because I had just finished the Zeros tour and then they flew me to Vienna and put me up in this great, giant apartment and gave me a Mercedes to use while I was there. We'd go through these meetings and everything we talked about would be written down by these secretaries, and we'd have the notes. And if we needed any books or references, someone was there so I could say, I need to look at *Rock'n'Roll Swindle* and they would go out and bring it to me that afternoon. Or I'd say, I need to see the Alan Freed book, and then they'd go out and get it. They put me up for a week and I'd just take notes and ideas and movies clips and say, let's make something like this, and we'd brainstorm these movies, or ideas for these movies. We came up with three different scripts and it was a nice thing. But that's show biz, one of those things. I've had a lot of great chances. In my first year of doing El Vez, I was speaking with people at Disney, and had been under contract at Warner Bros. once with a guy who now manages Jennifer Lopez. He was working for me for awhile, and we were working on a show for Warner Bros. I was under contract. They sent me to acting schools. It was a Patty Duke idea of me playing El Vez and Raul Raul, who is this Latino-Chicano angry young man, kind of a Chicano Kerouac beat kind of poet character that I had done before. I got all this money, pre-filming money, but it fell through. I did a thing with HBO last summer, and that was a nice thing. Things come and go. I always have a ton of stuff on my plate, so I don't mind when things fall through because that means I get some break time. Then I have the other band to work with, and so many El Vez projects to work on, so I don't worry too much. There's always something placed in front of me.



Is there a part of you who wishes to be back at the gallery like in the 1980s?

Sometimes, because when I see a real good artist I say, if this was marketed in the right way, it could be very popular, or done better, this and that. I love art, whether it's visual, audio, or painting kind of stuff. It's always attracted me.

Did you ever end up recording with Jon Spencer Blues Explosion?

No, don't know how that came out. Somebody must have misquoted something. Someone else asked me about that.

There was a mention of a gospel record in one article.

Hmm. We did a song heavily influenced by him that came out as a single in London around last Christmas. The new album has a song called "Odelay," a version of "Oh Happy Day." It's about border crossing, with the Rio Grande being a baptism into the water, like born new again. We did a version, knock-off studio version that sounds a lot like Jon Spencer. It was called "Odelay: I Heart J.B.P.E." version, and it was released as a single in London. But I think that's where people might have got it. I don't think I was actually quoted as saying that (*laughs*). But if I was, it's all show biz, and it fell through.

But you were quoted as saying Morrissey was trying to steal your ideas.

(*laughs*) No, he said that. The year before that we did a small tour with him in Vegas and California, and he wanted us to do the US and England, but I got too busy with my own shows. But he had said in the press that he thought I was great and was trying to steal all my ideas. He just point blank said that, but I thought that was a nice compliment. Some people said they had seen his shows in Brazil and he was wearing copies of outfits I had.

Or he had tried to speak some Spanish and say he was Mexican.

He has a big Latino following in California. Kids love him. He's always admitted liking Latino culture.

If Elvis rolled out of the grave and came to your house, what would you say to him?

I don't have any questions about songs, or what he did. I'm happy with my Elvis lore and the ways things went, but I would like to know what it's like to come back from the dead.

Was your early band Indian Summer named after the Channel 3 song?
No, I didn't come up with the name. It was one of the twins, Seth and Adam, who were in the band. They were big Dischord fans, and a lot of Kill Rock Stars stuff. And I think there's a Beat Happening song called that, and I think they may have named it after that. Ironically, there's about a hundred bands named Indian Summer, but there was a band on Dischord called Indian Summer a long time ago. That's the extent of that story.

On one of the early silk screened sleeve 7"s, you sample a track from either Mahalia Jackson or Bessie Smith at the beginning.
It was Bessie Smith.

That seems to be a kind of link between your earlier work and Her Space Holiday, which is an interest in spare, stripped down material.
I guess indirectly I could see that. I didn't listen to Bessie Smith back then. I guess it was more of an aesthetic thing, but I can definitely see the connection, because the stuff we do now is so stripped down, and I don't know if that's because of the lack of skills on the instruments, or just because basically that's how it turns out in the end to get the message across, whatever that message is.

At one time you said you were listening to a lot of field recordings, did you mean the Smithsonian recordings made in places like the Deep South in the 1930s?
No, not so much literal field recordings, but in the sense…Well, there's a record store near my house and there's a lot of recordings that people did in the 1960s and 1970s when they were doing more experimental recording and a lot of it just had to do with city sounds and nature sounds. So it was more organic, not so much instrumentation, but more like environments. When I started Her Space Holiday, when it was more of a space rock thing, I found that using a lot of textures through pedals and things like that were kind of in the same vein as those kind of atmospheric recordings because it gave it more a background.

"People will get over-loaded with technology and flashy edited music. Music will eventually end up being more organic," you once said. Is that what you are consciously leaning towards?
God, I don't know when I said that.

A couple years ago.
Well, the new album is all electronic, even the guitar parts were never played more than once. The previous albums were more like singer songwriter. I'd do stuff on the guitar and sing over it, and with this record I'd just play something, dump it into the computer and build a huge library of sounds and pick and pull everything together, and a lot of that came from the re-mixes that I started getting into. Even though it has more of a band feel, the record is still more a drum'n'bass record. It's all just samples and computer-generated things. It is true that people, well things are going to get so saturated with technology, it's going to be so experimental one day that it's going to turn back to a point where even an acoustic guy will be even more groundbreaking eventually than a whole electronic record to some extent.

Or bands like Can, who used analog tapes, or traditional jazz, which uses acoustic instruments, but has complex arrangements.
Yeah, definitely. And I think I've just got so used to working by myself and not having an ear or talent for playing all the instruments I use. The computers allowed someone like me, with an interest but a minimum of talent, to put something together that would be a little more complex. It's just another tool to fill in the gaps.

At the tail end of your band period, you got sick of the shows, sick of the band politics, and etc, and picked up a 4-track and was inspired. Most people might say, I got a 16 track to myself and I feel so free in my home studio, but a 4-track seems so self-limiting, so why was it so inspiring?
I think it was inspiring not so much because of the technology or the amount of tracks, but inspiring because it was the first time I could do whatever I wanted with a song, because I was always very passive when it came to bands and I had a lot of people that were not only talented but had a lot of strong ideas, so I contributed, but it wasn't ever anything that was right on point with what I wanted to do. With a 4-track, it just opened up a world where no one was going to have input, for better or worse. If stuff came out bad, then it was a learning process that I did completely on my own, so that's where that freedom came from.

You got sick of the baggage that comes with bands, but is there a certain amount of baggage with a project like Her Space Holiday?
Yeah, I mean definitely there is. There are a lot of drawbacks, especially with the live performance. The last couple of records we did started doing better, so you have to go out and promote them, and in the beginning it felt like I was trapped where I didn't want to be like before, like I have an obligation to tour and do things, but the first time Keely, my partner in Her Space Holiday, and I went out, we just basically had a DAT machine and sat behind two keyboards and were terrified, and it was just an awful experience. We decided just not to take it seriously, and Tiger Style gave us a budget to get these really bad Spinal Tap lights and fog machines, so we decided we are just going to go out, and we have limitations as far as performing a lot of the music goes, but we are just going to make it as fun as possible for ourselves. That kind of eliminated some of the drawback of that. Also there's a freedom to doing it by yourself, but there's also a limitation, like I don't know whenever a song is going to stop. They could just stop at any time, you know. That's always scary, because you don't have other people to bounce ideas off of. There are pros and cons to both.

Does it become kind of masturbatory or narcissistic?
Yeah, narcissistic for sure, especially with the older records and a lot of the lyrical content, which was self-absorbed. One thing about doing re-mixes and building stuff out of samples, now it is more improvisational and the process more organic because I don't know when I sit down what's going to happen with something. You throw things into places, and if something strikes your ear as usable, you



Not So Spacey After All: Finding the Vibes with Her Space Holiday

build off of that. It's like a 50/50 shot between my input and what the technology kicks back at me. It can be very random.

You believe that re-mixing is as challenging as writing and creating your own songs? So, can you give an example, say, like the Bright Eyes remix on the new record?
The thing I found so surprising about re-mixes, and I get a lot of shit for this, a lot of people take the original elements and chop those up, and I'd rather take, if it has a lot of predominant vocals, just the vocal tracks from people. The thing, especially with the Bright Eye's song, that was so different is when I put up Conor's vocals by themselves, you hear a very different emotion than what was usually showing up in the song. I mean it's challenging in the fact that you don't want to do an artist a disservice by doing something that takes away from the original integrity. I try to keep that as much intact as possible, and the bands have final say. If they don't like something, I won't release it. It is challenging to work off someone else's delivery and try to keep in mind how things sound in your head as well as try and keep what they were trying to get across intact. That part is challenging, but I do like doing re-mixes more than doing my own stuff, because I think the weakest element of Her Space Holiday is vocals and it gives me a chance to work with people who can really sing.

You are really into hip hop right now, like Common. Why do you think hip hop seems more experimental than rock'n'roll?
Well, I think that with any genres there are stagnant points, especially in commercial hip hop. And just being a white kid from the suburbs, I always feel that when I listen to hip hop it's always from the outside, you know? It's almost a political movement within itself. But I think that's where some of the experimentation arrives. Well, it's still a new genre compared to rock'n'roll, even though it has been around 20-30 years. But it's just delivery, and there's a lot more crossover than standard hip hop music, there's a lot more orchestration of things going on, so I think hip hop in itself is evolving faster than any kind of music. It's definitely the punk rock of now.

In the past you've thought about the minimalism of a short silent film and non-musical influences. Does taking a look at other mediums and using them to shape your music still important?
Especially a lot in film. I think with the new record, *Manic Expressive*, the biggest influence on that was that Lars Van Trier film *Breaking the Waves*. When we came off tour I was going to take off a few months and not write an album, so I heard a lot about the movie and just rented it, and he's like a composer in his own right. It's like art is very similar, because sometimes a movie or a song can make you feel exactly the same way. It seems like he always hits his mark. I think pop music in general, and the stuff that I do, I think, is the cheapest form of art in a lot of ways, and there's good and bad in every medium, so you can tend to get a lot of inspiration from other works, different books or movies, compared to listening to someone else's songs, because it's too homogenized.

Lars uses hand-held cameras and natural lightning, so he limits his use of technology, but is able to make something very poetic.
Right, just straight from the emotion. The new album actually had a song on it with samples from *Breaking the Waves,* but we couldn't get them cleared in time, so we had to release the album without it, which was a bummer.

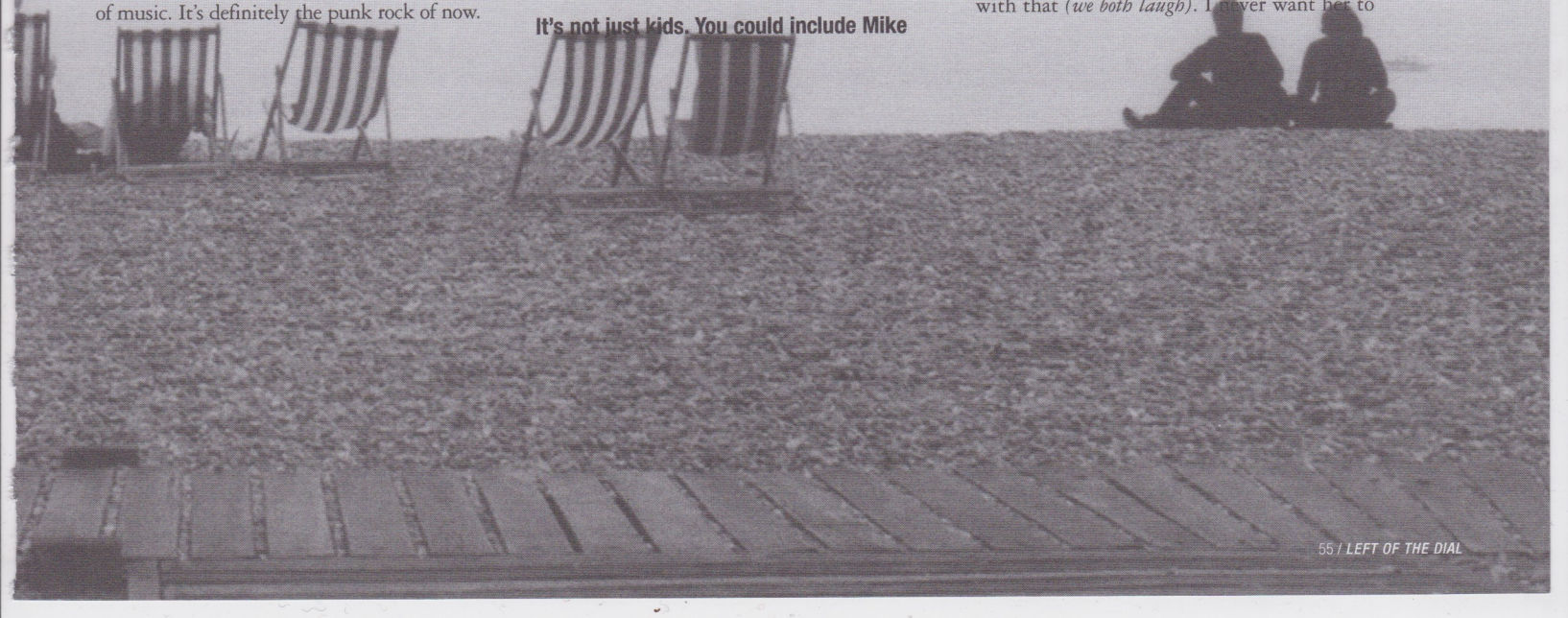
Did it surprise you that the new album was voted one of the top most obscure records by the New York Times? Do you feel that you are that obscure?
I'm not surprised by the obscure part, I think I am more surprised that it even made it on a list like that in general. I think obscure was something that the *New York Times* could use that meant not really in the mainstream, because some of the other stuff in that listing was not obscure at all. I'm not doing anything groundbreaking or different. There are thousands of kids doing the same type of stuff. You know, some kid who played in hardcore bands makes bad indie rock or space rock and gets computerized. There are at least fifty of those kids in every city.

It's not just kids. You could include Mike Fellow's project called Mighty Flashlight, because he used to be in Rites of Spring.
It definitely becomes passe after awhile. I don't know what I would do next, like I said doing an acoustic album would be more experimental. I don't know if I am ever going to make another record, and if I do if it's going to have electronics. This didn't feel like the end all, be all of records that I wanted to make.

Well, with the eight records you've released you've talked about a sense of closure. So I assume that releasing those records and putting them behind you gives you a certain sense of freedom.
Yeah. I think so, for sure. I don't know. With this record it's so different because for the first time I definitely realize that people are buying the record. It's undeniable, but I still don't know where it sits with people. So I still have that freedom, and hopefully I'll always have that even if we did oddly enough sell a lot of records. It's like anything can happen with each record depending on how you feel.

Tell us about the San Francisco band Half Film you once were interested in.
Half Film…My friend Jason plays in it, and it's two people from Scotland. They are not around anymore. The drummer was from the Bay area. They're very much like Low or Bedhead, or were very much like that. Male and female vocals, and really slow, repetitive stuff.

At one point you really liked what they were doing. Could you see yourself working with people like that on projects?
Not with Her Space Holiday. It's the most ideal set up. I've been with Keely eight years, and I have found when things started picking up more…Well, I've had girlfriends when I was in a band…Well, one experience that was really defining is that Keely is a photographer and she had a show in the city and I spent all this time at music shows with people introducing her like, "Oh this is my girlfriend," and I was the guy in the band. But the whole role was reversed, and people were like, "What do you do?' and I was like, "I play music." They were like, well, good luck with that *(we both laugh)*. I never want her to



feel like that. So when we had the opportunity to travel, it's such a huge part of our lives that the only way things are going to work is if we did it together now. It's awesome. We get to travel, she doesn't have to work and I don't have to work. We just do Her Space Holiday, so it's nice.

But you once said that, "I think that a live performance would ultimately be a damaging thing." Yet, you are on the road.
That quote was said after we played a couple shows and we did the sitting behind the keyboards thing. It was very relative, and that quote was very accurate for about a year and a half, until we changed our attitude and realized that if we go out there, and if the shows suck and everybody hates us, it doesn't change anything, doesn't change what I feel about what I am doing or how she feels or anything. You just have to realize that everything is so temporary and just kind of enjoy the fact that we are here in Houston right now, and we wouldn't have been here before if it wasn't for what we are doing, so we just kind of lightened up a little.

When I listen to the record I think of Wire's *154*, or Can records, late Velvet Underground, but two years ago you mentioned that you were enjoying Bjork and Cat Stevens. So what are you listening to today that might surprise people?
Well, I still listen to a lot of Bjork.

Who was in a Lars Van Trier film.
Yeah, it's all masturbatory; it's all together. I've actually never heard Wire and never heard Can. I'm not a huge fan of Velvet Underground, but definitely I see the influences for sure.

I was thinking of "Pale Blue Eyes" or "Ocean."
To be honest, I don't listen to a lot of music anymore. In the car now, it's been overload. I don't find it as relaxing as I used to, because there's so much, I know this sounds terrible, there's so much business involved with what we do and so many decisions we need to make and legal things and this and that, so when I relax, it's more like watching a movie or turning everything off. I would have to say I really love the Jay-Z record, even though it's totally commercial, *The Blueprint* album. There's something else that we just got. I don't know. It's pretty much the same type of stuff. A lot of electronic music from Germany. I don't know if you are familiar with that label, More Music. The work with artists like Phonan and Aeroname, it's really just experimental, but beautiful.

Why did you opt for Tiger Style instead of putting out your own record?
I always thought that if I released records it would be selfish to release my own records on my own label, because we started for the fact of putting out bands that we liked. And also, now there's a lot of business stuff, there's a lot of people we have working in our corner. But I am also too shy to listen to my own music with someone else in the room, so I don't see how I could ever push it as a product. When I was dealing with Insound, who is connected to Tiger Style, because of Audio Information Phenomena stuff, 4AD was supposed to release *Home is Where You Hang Yourself*. From what I was told, they had a whole A&R structure of people that I was dealing with that left, and Tiger Style picked up the ball. It was right when they were starting out. We really lucked out, because if we went with 4AD we would have just got lost in the whole mix. Tiger Style has the capital to really run a label professionally, but they are so enthusiastic, just like any record geek you can find. So it's a good combination for sure.

Has it surprised you how well you have been received in Japan and England?
I don't even know if we are being well received. I know our records do well at least in Europe. We still can't get a licensing deal in Japan, which is strange because our single sold out there in a week, but we just can't get the new record over there. It used to be that Europe was doing so much better, and the U.S. was kind of stagnant, but the last month or so it has completely flipped. So the record is actually doing better and there's more opportunities coming up in the States, but I am just surprised if anyone likes it.

At one point, you would write a song, then lay in bed with Keely (who you had written them for) and listen to them, with seems borderline cheesy and romantic…
It is cheesy. That's not what love, but what relationships do to you. It was one of those things, like with your girlfriend I assume, you probably have a lot of stuff you probably don't want people to know you do together, like the little names you have for each other, or the times when you run around naked and she hits you with a towel. I just kind of happen to let it out by mistake. It was a momentary lapse of…

Candor.
It's cheesy, and we don't do that now. She's part of that band. We had a really shitty relationship when we started out. We were just young. It really took five or six years just to get to know someone. So it was something that we just did, we were just both kind of an emotional mess.

When you get done with the tour, what's the first thing you want to do?
Well, this is what sucks. We were so excited about touring and geared up that we're actually touring eight months this year. So after this tour we only have four days off before we go back out to do another month and a half, then we eight days off then go to Europe for two months, then we have two weeks off and do the U. S. again. What's been driving me crazy is that I haven't been able to record or to remix, and there are offers that still come in. We got into a really bad car accident in Iowa City and lost five shows…So we have to get stuff done to the van. I have to get portable stuff to record so while we are on the road I can record in the van while Keely's driving. Other than that, I will probably get a burrito at my favorite place.



FLASHBACKS WITH SNFU AND SOULSIDE

SNFU played a show in Rockford, IL back in the late 1980s at the Polish Falcon's Club, which was a large empty hall with a bar in a backroom where tough wrinkled Polish immigrants drank fistfuls of hard liquor and watched TV. Across the street was the abandoned playing field of the 1940s women's baseball league Rockford Peaches, immortalized by Madonna in the movie *A League of Their Own*. We spent all day hammering on big slabs of lumber to make a stage fit enough for the nimble Chi Pig to jump around like it was a trampoline. He was legendary for getting more air than Michael Jordan, like he had tight steel coils for kneecaps. Moss Icon, dour Washington D.C. post-punkers, showed up to play in an opening slot. The sweaty, blanched-faced, salmon-pink singer vomited on stage and looked as if someone had squeezed him until he was a deflated balloon. Shudder to Think, with singer Craig Wedren wearing skin tight bleached blue jean cut-offs and thick flowing Medusa hair, taunted the skinheads with shrill angular guitar and vocal bursts. Meanwhile, SNFU were godly, dexterous and mischievous, fast-fingered without losing a groove, and Chi Pig's leg actually burst through the plywood after one of his five foot plus jumps. They came back the next year to play a hall in a different neighborhood, but it was not quite as awe-aspiring as the first sneak peak of "Black Cloud," "She's Not on the Menu" *Flipside* compilation version, and "I Forget." It was the only hardcore band I can remember that had the guts to relish cheesy songwriters like Cat Steven's ("Wild World") and Eddie Money ("Gimme Some Water"). I used to shove a homemade cassette of them into a cheap hand held tape player, ride on the bus to Freeport, IL, home of the oddly named Pretzels, with my basketball squad and dream of Canada's wild punk rock terrain. After a morning of humiliation at the hands of lame high school coaches, SNFU was like a shot of whiskey and adrenaline, a burst of gasoline and hydrogen fuel. And if you ever wanted to find the roots of NOFX-style hardcore, it's right in the twin guitar interplay of these northerners.

Soulside were a whole different boat. Out of the remnants of Lunchmeat, they were part and parcel of the Sammich scene, the label run by Amanda MacKaye (yes, Ian's sister), who also put out records by Swiz and Shudder to Think, among others. They represent the real beginnings of emo to me. The songs had punchy stop and start rhythms, wall-to-wall guitar crunch, and a heady lyrical mix of youth politics, social justice, and emotional angst. Their album *Trigger* and 3-song single were prime, must-have listening for post-hardcore kids. They came on a tour with American Standard and Swiz in two nondescript white mini-vans, and I remember the lead singer of American Standard leaning out the window and taunting Amanda with a *Penthouse* mag. Later, I got to listen to Dag Nasty demos (eventually released by Selfless Records) featuring Shawn from Swiz singing as we went to go get pizza. At the time, I had an emo band called Insight (no, not the more famous Ohio one), and we practiced in a garage behind our singer's house. His neighbor in back had a towering half-pipe in the backyard, so the bands all eagerly jumped on it until the neighbor kid came lumbering out with his dirt bike to throw down some tricks. Soulside practiced with our amps and drums in the same garage, and I hunkered down quietly in the corner, watching them churn out the more moody, wide-open, and even slightly slow motion decontrolled funk punk textures (ala P.I.L. it sees to me, the eventual blueprint for Girls Against Boys?) that dominated *Hot Bodi-Gram*, their third full-length. They stayed at my friend Jeremy's house, but showed up at mine the next day while I was gone briefly. My sister was doing laundry when the singer Bobby, hair all tangled and matted up in long dreads, walked right into the kitchen and scared her half to death, the same way that Shawn from Swiz, who seems over six foot tall and is African American, did when he, to the surprise of my groggy mother, walked in at 2:00 in the morning with the band the night before.

Here's a little chunk of that time. Fortunately for you, Dischord has re-mastered many of the label's early records, including the Soulside, Embrace, and Shudder to Think. So check them out.





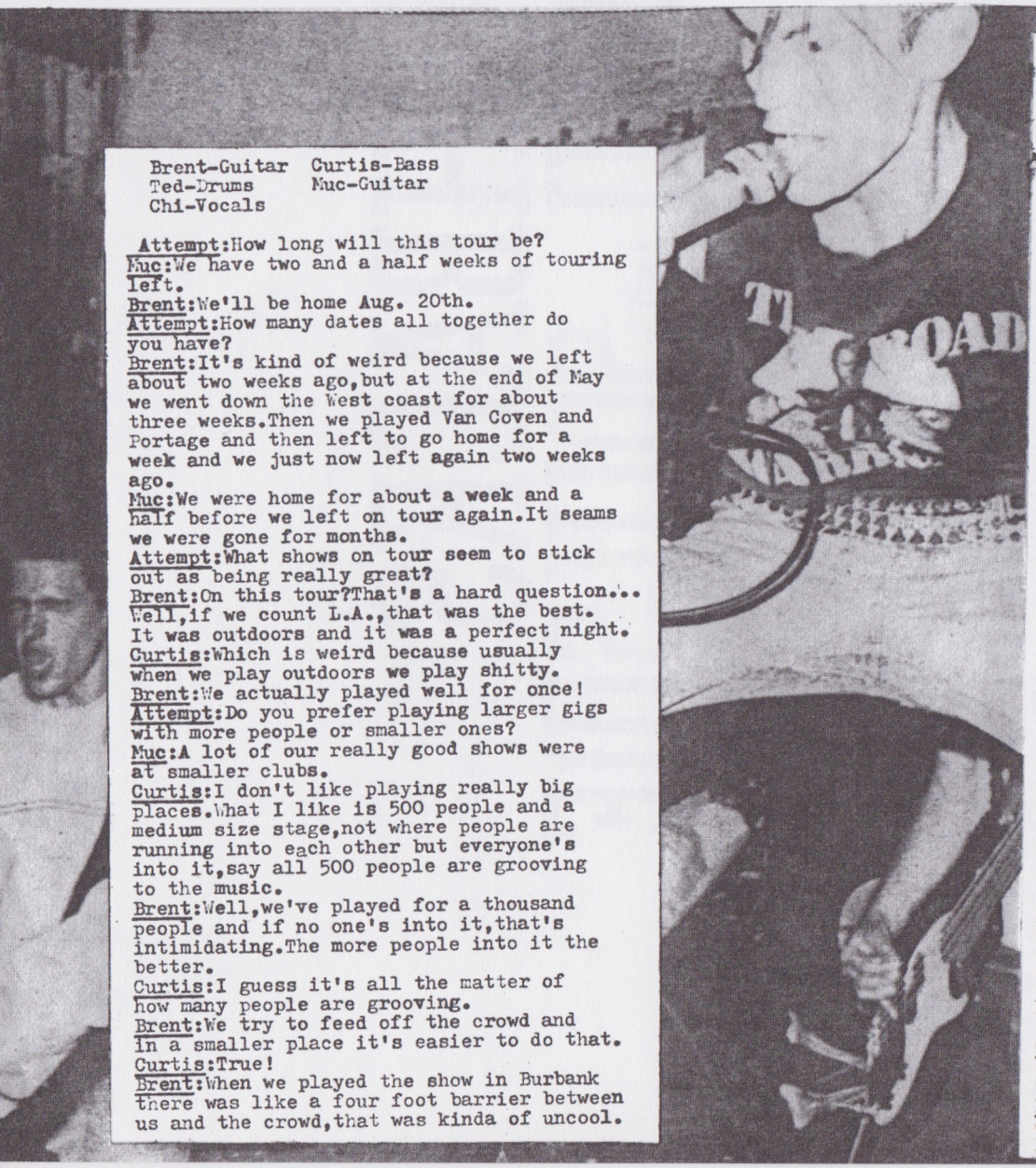
SNFU / David Ensminger

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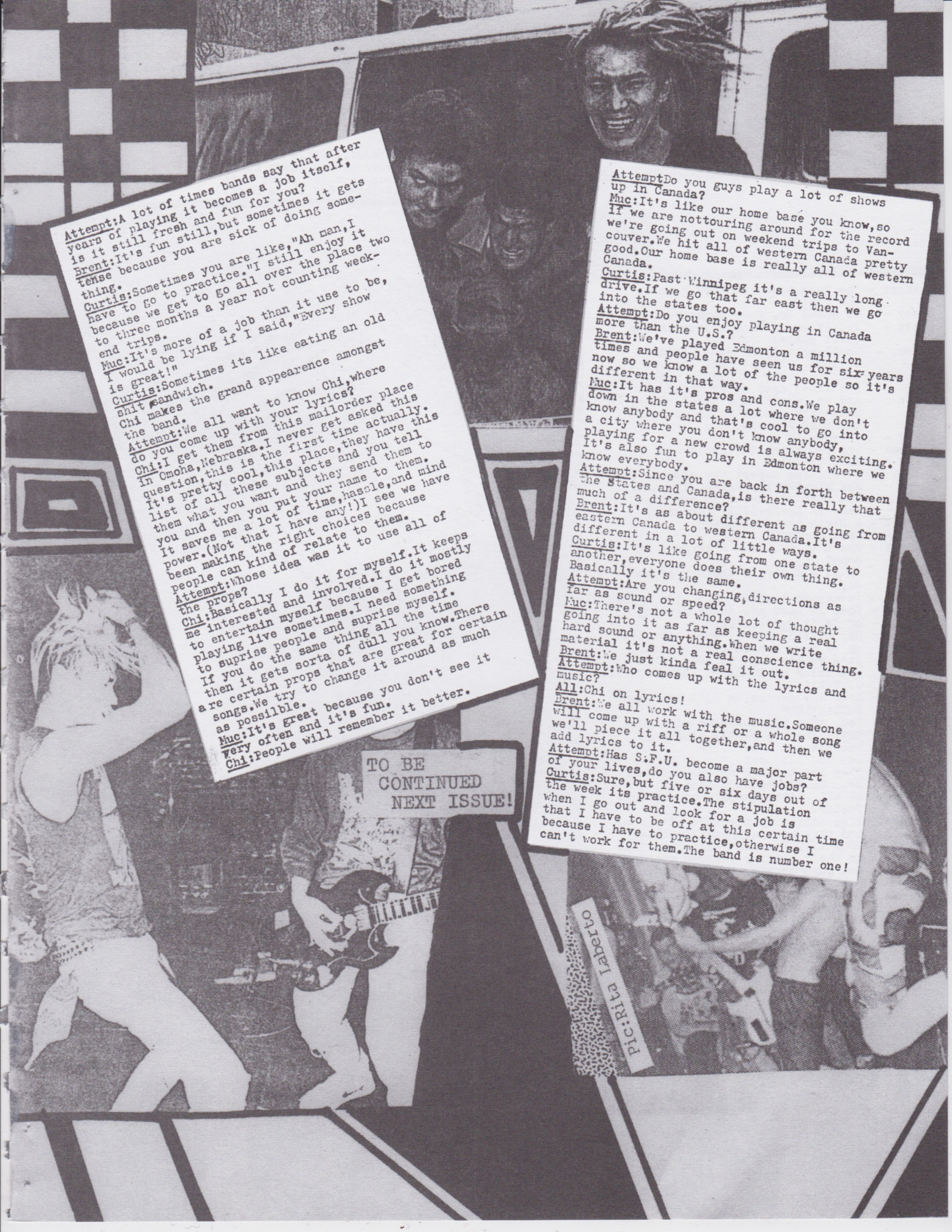




Brent-Guitar Curtis-Bass
Ted-Drums Muc-Guitar
Chi-Vocals

Attempt:How long will this tour be?
Muc:We have two and a half weeks of touring left.
Brent:We'll be home Aug. 20th.
Attempt:How many dates all together do you have?
Brent:It's kind of weird because we left about two weeks ago,but at the end of May we went down the West coast for about three weeks.Then we played Van Coven and Portage and then left to go home for a week and we just now left again two weeks ago.
Muc:We were home for about a week and a half before we left on tour again.It seams we were gone for months.
Attempt:What shows on tour seem to stick out as being really great?
Brent:On this tour?That's a hard question... Well,if we count L.A.,that was the best. It was outdoors and it was a perfect night.
Curtis:Which is weird because usually when we play outdoors we play shitty.
Brent:We actually played well for once!
Attempt:Do you prefer playing larger gigs with more people or smaller ones?
Muc:A lot of our really good shows were at smaller clubs.
Curtis:I don't like playing really big places.What I like is 500 people and a medium size stage,not where people are running into each other but everyone's into it,say all 500 people are grooving to the music.
Brent:Well,we've played for a thousand people and if no one's into it,that's intimidating.The more people into it the better.
Curtis:I guess it's all the matter of how many people are grooving.
Brent:We try to feed off the crowd and in a smaller place it's easier to do that.
Curtis:True!
Brent:When we played the show in Burbank there was like a four foot barrier between us and the crowd,that was kinda of uncool.
Curtis:They weren't allowing any stage diving,they were tackling people and shit. Actually they were being kinda of nice,they were just escorting them off,they weren't kicking them out of the place.
Brent:It was a little game to see who could get up on the stage.
Attempt:It seems like S.N.F.U is really huge at the moment,does it feel different going from playing to small crowds and now playing really large concerts?
Muc:When we first went on tour we lucked out in a way because we had real good contacts,like we played with the Bad Brains at the Ritz.When we went to L.A. we also had good contacts so we got to play a few large shows.It's not like we have been thrown into it.But like,this tour not every show we play is a thousand people or anything.In the bigger cities we have a lot larger shows.
Brent:They just don't have a thousand people to watch us in Lincoln,Nebraska!
Attempt:Is there going to be a new record coming out?
Muc:It's all recorded,it's all mixed,and we know who is going to do it in Canada. There is a distributor in Montreal called Cargo who is going to do it.
Brent:We have to work out all the details with them.We have a few ideas and possibilities.It's just the way we have to go about doing it.We could do it through a Canadian label or do it ourselves.We have to figure all that out.
Attempt:What happened with B.Y.O.?
Curtis:Lack of advertising.They just seemed to have lost interest in the label.
Muc:I don't think B.Y.O. is even going to be around before the year is over.
Brent:They won't admit it,they say they are doing as good as ever.They never had the money to advertise the records.We played two shows in L.A...
Muc:Shawn was on the guest list both times and we never saw him.We're friends and all but there has to be some business,we're a band without a label.It's been a year since the second album came out and they haven't called us to see what we are doing or anything.
Curtis:We phone them and tell them we are setting up a tour and they say,"Oh really, that's great."
Brent:WE really don't know what they are doing.I wish we could be on B.Y.O. because I liked what they were doing.





Attempt:A lot of times bands say that after years of playing it becomes a job itself, is it still fresh and fun for you?
Brent:It's fun still,but sometimes it gets tense because you are sick of doing something.
Curtis:Sometimes you are like,"Ah man,I have to go to practice."I still enjoy it because we get to go all over the place two to three months a year not counting weekend trips.
Muc:It's more of a job than it use to be, I would be lying if I said,"Every show is great!"
Curtis:Sometimes its like eating an old shit sandwich.
Chi makes the grand appearence amongst the band.
Attempt:We all want to know Chi,where do you come up with your lyrics?
Chi:I get them from this mailorder place in Omoha,Nebraska.I never get asked this question,this is the first time actually. It's pretty cool,this place,they have this list of all these subjects and you tell them what you want and they send them to you and then you put your name to them. It saves me a lot of time,hassle,and mind power.(Not that I have any!)I see we have been making the right choices because people can kind of relate to them.
Attempt:Whose idea was it to use all of the props?
Chi:Basically I do it for myself.It keeps me interested and involved.I do it mostly to entertain myself because I get bored playing live sometimes.I need something to suprise people and suprise myself. If you do the same thing all the time then it gets sorta of dull you know.There are certain props that are great for certain songs.We try to change it around as much as possilble.
Muc:It's great because you don't see it very often and it's fun.
Chi:People will remember it better.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE!

AttemptDo you guys play a lot of shows up in Canada?
Muc:It's like our home base you know,so if we are nottouring around for the record we're going out on weekend trips to Vancouver.We hit all of western Canada pretty good.Our home base is really all of western Canada.
Curtis:Past Winnipeg it's a really long drive.If we go that far east then we go into the states too.
Attempt:Do you enjoy playing in Canada more than the U.S.?
Brent:We've played Edmonton a million times and people have seen us for six years now so we know a lot of the people so it's different in that way.
Muc:It has it's pros and cons.We play down in the states a lot where we don't know anybody and that's cool to go into a city where you don't know anybody, playing for a new crowd is always exciting. It's also fun to play in Edmonton where we know everybody.
Attempt:Since you are back in forth between the States and Canada,is there really that much of a difference?
Brent:It's as about different as going from eastern Canada to western Canada.It's different in a lot of little ways.
Curtis:It's like going from one state to another,everyone does their own thing. Basically it's the same.
Attempt:Are you changing,directions as far as sound or speed?
Muc:There's not a whole lot of thought going into it as far as keeping a real hard sound or anything.When we write material it's not a real conscience thing.
Brent:We just kinda feal it out.
Attempt:Who comes up with the lyrics and music?
All:Chi on lyrics!
Brent:We all work with the music.Someone will come up with a riff or a whole song we'll piece it all together,and then we add lyrics to it.
Attempt:Has S.F.U. become a major part of your lives,do you also have jobs?
Curtis:Sure,but five or six days out of the week its practice.The stipulation when I go out and look for a job is that I have to be off at this certain time because I have to practice,otherwise I can't work for them.The band is number one!

Pic:Rita Laberto

SOULSIDE

Soulside was interviewed Thurs. July 28, 1988 the day after their Rockford Il. show at a local rollar rink. Present at the interview was all of Soulside, Jack (there roadie), and Jeremy and Chris of Attempt. Soulside will be touring the U.S. for the next two weeks, so if they play in your town go check them out or you will regret it, believe me.

SOULSIDE is--

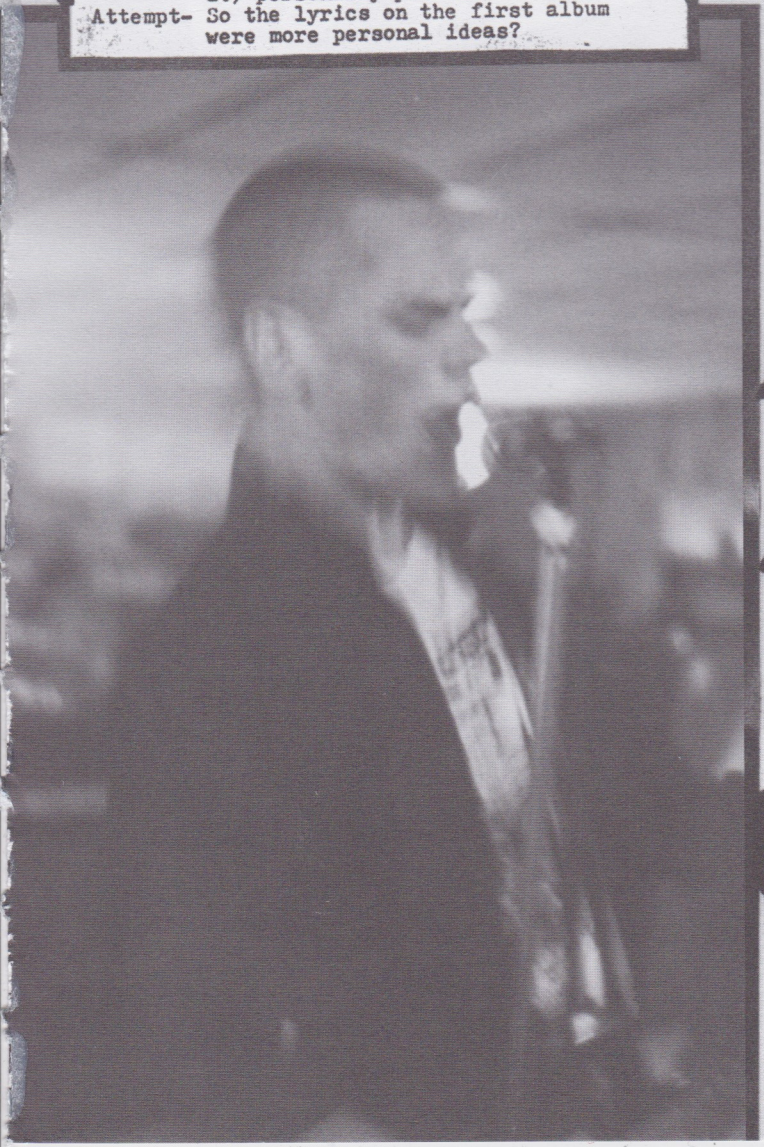
John-bass(21 years old)
Bobby-vocals(21 years old)
Alexias-drums(21 years old)
Scott-guitar(20 years old)

Attempt - How long have you guys been on the road?
Bobby - Go ahead Mr. Tour manager...
Scott - ... it was Johnny's tour in the first place.
Johnny - No (laughing) we just finished my tour. It's a week ago Friday when we left. Thursday night was our first date up in Washington and we..what's the date? 28th, Thursday? Oh so we've been on the road 2 weeks.
Bobby - 4 weeks to go!
Attempt - Are you doing the whole U.S. East to West?
Johnny - Everything except the south. We are playing in Mexico, Tijuana.
Bobby - The 28th of August is our last show in Louisville, Kentucky.
Attempt - A North American tour?
Booby - That's right.
Attempt - The name SOULSIDE what does it mean?
Bobby - Oh it's a name I thought of one day.
(everyone laughs - a little applause)
Attempt - Does it have any inner meaning or is it just.....?
Bobby - No, well I mean it does but it's up to your own interpretation.
Johnny - It's really easy to read into. You think of SOULSIDE, SOULSIDE??.. ...Yeh!!
Attempt - Ever any confusion with the band SOULASYLUM?
Scott - Yeh, they get confused with us a lot. They're really pissed at because you know....
Attempt - You use the Soul?
Scott - They are totally seperate from us. We are not the same thing at all. I've hardly had any confusion.
Johnny - I've called up a couple of places and they are surprised to think SOUL ASYLUM would call them. They do their booking through agents.
Attempt - You guys do your own booking?
Bobby - Yeh.
Attempt - SOULSIDE use to be LUNCHMEAT, How many years ago was that? Are you all the original members of LUNCHMEAT?





Bobby - Johnny isn't.
Johnny - I decided not to join the band.
Bobby - Actually what happened was - let's see.. LUNCHMEAT was 84' 85' and then we all went to school. We came back for the summer of 86'.
Bobby - and got SOULSIDE together with the exact same members of LUNCHMEAT, and then after that summer recorded an album.
Attempt- Into different music too?
Bobby - Yeh.
Scott - We didn't want to play the old LUNCHMEAT stuff.
Attempt- What's the difference between the LUNCHMEAT sound and SOULSIDE sound?
Bobby - Soundwise I would just say SOULSIDE is a little bit more advanced. I mean after your first year at college you do throw up a lot.
Scott - We take SOULSIDE a lot more seriously than LUNCHMEAT, with LUNCHMEAT we were just having fun. When we got SOULSIDE together we wanted more of a serious band. You know let's really think about what we are doing.
Attempt- How long was SOULSIDE together before you recorded the first album?
Scott - We recorded the first album in the summer of '86, but it didn't come out till the summer of '87.
Johnny - It was on SAMMICH/DISCORD Records.
Attempt- When is the new album going to be released and are there any changes music wise compared to the first album?
Bobby - I think the biggest change between the two albums is lyricly, the lyrics and ideas on the new album are a lot more politically aware, we're more involved in what's going on in the sense I mean the first album was not more (as MRR put it) personally political.
Attempt- So the lyrics on the first album were more personal ideas?



Bobby - Exactly, I mean the lyrics are still personal, but we're invovled with the thing - politics on a personal level. I still write personal lyrics. I happen to be a vegetarian now and that's personal to me.
Attempt - Who in the band is vegetarian?
Bobby - Half of us. Johnny and I are.
Johnny - Musically also the new record seems to be a shift away from the traditional hardcore sound format.
Scott - It's groovy.
Bobby - It gets more into a groove.
Scott - Instead of like..CLICK CLICK CLICK 2 minutes musically grind, everybody going off, it's like drums and bass will be grooving for a while then I'll bring the guitar in, then the vocals coming in as much more of a sparce type minimalistic sound.
Attempt - Any stories about what happened on the road this tour?
Johnny - Last September when we toured the country we stopped by Jimmy Swagart Ministry. We didn't get to play, but we ran around naked.
Scott - I've never been Baptised so I wanted to Baptise my entire body. (laughter)
Bobby - Not to many crazy things have happened to us.
Scott - We've never been robbed!
Johnny - Bobby was sort of robbed. Wasn't It while we were waiting for a show?
Bobby - Oh yeh that's true, I got robbed in Boston. My wallet was stolen.
Attempt - Who writes the songs?
Scott - Usually the way it works is I might play a few guitar riffs then Johnny and me and Alexias get together and put the music down and then we start jaming on something. Bobby fits vocals to it and we get a grove together and we all throw ideas in and next thing you know we have a song!
Johnny - Sometimes Alexias gets a beat and we put music to that.
Scott - Those are the kinds of songs that turn out groovy because we write it all on the same wave lengths. I do not like coming up with the song on my own.



Johnny - For us the music comes first. The music and the message.

Attempt- What is the message?

Bobby - Well as fast as an underlined theme that you might get out of the songs is just to be conscious of what the fucks going on. Whether it is on the news or your personal life.

Attempt- What about schooling? Are any of you going to college? (Bobby, Scott, Alexias reply yes) Right now I'm still trying to decide between the school and the band.

Scott - Are you going back next year? I'm not thinking anything about school right now. I've got a lot of stuff on my mind. I don't know if I will go back next year. Maybe I'll take a year off. Me and Alexias are going to finish school. Those guys are going back, I got to do still a lot of things. I want to visit Africa.

Alesias- College is over rated but its something

Bobby - It's over rated. I mean look at Ian MacKay. People should try to do. Well it's good for some people. For some not.

Johnny - I think when a lot of people get to college it's like they don't have their parents breathing down their backs, and that just makes them want to face the world on their own, and in a lot of cases their parents pay for the college so they sit around for four years reading, studying, hanging with friends and basically figuring out what the fuck you want to do with yourself. And to a lot of people college is just a party, they just go to party. It's definitely the most expensive party I've ever been to!

Attempt - I noticed Bobby's wearing AIRWALK shoes are you huys a skate band?

Bobby - (Laughter)

Johnny - Yeh we all skate vert! That is the only reason why Jack's here because he skates. There was this other Roadie we were going to bring but he didn't know how to skate!

Attempt - Scott I noticed you have an X on your hand. What do you think about the straight edge movement?

Bobby - (Laughter) The whole straight edge thing, the translation has been mixed up along the lines it started in D.C. and got changed and everything. It's almost to bad it's called the thing because it means so many different things to so many people. But we don't like to label ourselves.

Attempt - Does SOULSIDE prefer pushing **their** music or playing for certain crowds?

Bobby - We would definitely play for a crowd that is not drinking, at least I would, and what I don't like about playing Canada is because generally people drink in Canada and we mostly play bars there and it's sad to see people into it, if they are drunk because you wonder if they will remember who you were the next day.

Attempt - Do you, with your music, want to stay underground, or doesn't that bother you?

Bobby - We are serious about our music, I mean that's why we are not like a skate band or a party band, something like that is completely different from what we are because we are a band and the music comes first. I think if people want to do that kind of stuff it's just a different thing. I don't want to be put in a group with those kinds of bands.

Attempt - What's the ideal show for You?

Bobby - So for the ideal show for us was Rochester. When we would play a grooving part of our song the people would be dancing and then we would set the pace faster then the people would run around again. Everyone was totally reacting to the music. It wasn't like I mean most people to to punk rock shows to slam dance and when we play the groovey parts they don't know what to do. But these people were totally into it. A lot of times when we play D.C. we've had that provlem were people don't know how to dance.

Bobby - So many bands have said they don't want slam dancing at their shows, so people don't really know what they are supposed to do.

Attempt - Do you enjoying playing D.C. more than other places?

Bobby - Not necessarily. Rochester show was better than any D.C. show we ever did.

Johnny - Well one of our better D.C. shows will be one of the best, but a lot are just pretty lame, not lame, but just like we just played another show type feeling.

Attempt - Like what are some of your musical influences? I noticed in your band you didn't listen to strickly hardcore.

Scott - We hardly ever listen to hardcore. I like hardcore a lot, though like Naked RAYGUN. But I don't listen to much new hardcore.

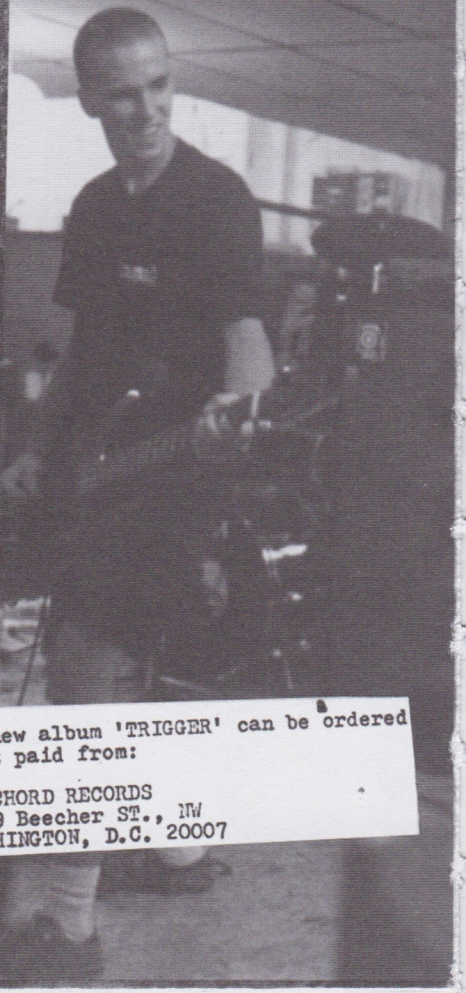
Bobby - I like hardcore but I listen to a lot of **funk**!

Alexias - I like everything.

Johnny - Me too.

Attempt - Any closing statements?

Bobby - Don't get caught in a MOSH!!



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THE HIVES

Although Elvis' earthquake hips came from the boondocks of Mississippi and Chuck Berry unraveled himself from the brown river midnight of St. Louis, the Hives make you think that bread and butter, hi-octane, whirlwind rock'n'roll came from a dinky industrial town in Sweden. With freshly scrubbed faces and skinny torsos, they writhe like a snake on crystal meth and launch rockets from their yelping mouths. With TV appearances and fashion shoots in Britain, they are beloved hipsters in the land of bowl haircut Beatles. They are a sort of working man's Strokes, but instead of being posers and wannabes, the Hives give off an aura of bowling alleys and fuzz petals and Ramones-meets-Rolling Stones swagger all buried in a mythology of 1950s drive-ins and Dead Kennedys speedball hyperactivity.

All photos by Blythe Tucker and David Ensminger



Do you consider yourselves children of Sweden, or children of rock'n'roll?
Howlin': I would say children of the world actually. It's not all American influences though, because the thing is that the influences we picked up we could have picked up anywhere. It's not really that isolated.

If you were in Moscow or Burundi you'd still pick up on those influences?
Howlin':They mostly come from our parents' records and from TV, and you could probably pick that up anywhere. Children of what though …Hmm…That's a tough question. I would say children of Sweden. We do like American rock'n'roll. Most of the stuff we do comes obviously from American rock'n'roll roots like New Orleans and R&B. If you want to go further back, it comes from Africa pretty much.

You were all thirteen years old, you started the band. So you were raiding your parents' record collection for Motown and rock records and learning about music?
Howlin': We first played punk rock because it's what we could adapt at that age to what we were doing. It's what made sense to us at the age of thirteen or fourteen.

and record that stuff because you can't afford to buy records at thirteen and fourteen. Not that many records at least. And at thirteen or fourteen, we rode the train for free to a bigger city where we could buy most punk records. We were mostly into 1970s punk though.

That's ironic, because you look like David Johansen from the New York Dolls after he left the band.
Howlin': People have been telling me this during this tour. I don't know, because I haven't seen that many faces of David Johansen. Maybe I am. The American bands we were into were like the Dead Kennedys and the Dead Boys and there were a couple of hardcore bands we liked. We liked the Bad Brains a lot.

Your parents were really supportive and bought you instruments and let you practice at their homes?
Howlin': Sure, exactly.

You were really that young when you had the band, the songs, and the ideas?
Nicholaus: Yes, we were like, these are the five people we want to play with. We had played instruments before that, but that's when we decided to get together.
Howlin': And then we decided to practice for five years before we did anything. I don't why. We'd always play out a lot, but we never thought we'd make a record. In the machine.
Howlin': I think you misunderstood it. The thing is we play a song only ten times before we go in the studio.
Nicholaus: We don't play it ten times in the studio. Just once, maybe two or three times.

With the first record, I assume you tried to make it feel live as possible?
Howlin': It's pretty much recorded that way.

You're all playing in the same room together?
Howlin': Yeah. All of us. I even sat in the room and sang some songs, but there was too much leakage. So the live stuff is with the band, then I put the vocals on top of it.

When you made the second record, did you worry that it might be too slick or too practiced sounding?
Nicholaus: We used that rule we just mentioned as well. As soon as the songs were finished, we weren't allowed to play them more than ten times as well, so we didn't lose that fresh feeling. Sometimes it does sound too slick.

In the beginning we knew more about how we wanted to sound rather than how to make it sound that way, so we started making up all kinds of rules for the music, like you can't use reverb on the guitar. You can't do this, you can't do that. We forbid a bunch of drum beats as well.

What were some of those bands specifically?
Howlin':A lot of Swedish punk bands. Also, American punk bands like the Dead Kennedys were kind of important.

You grew up in small town?
Howlin': A really small town.

So how did you get punk rock records?
Howlin': We went to a bigger town that was kind of close to us. We rode the train over.
Nicholaus: The first stuff we got was from our older siblings.

Did any of your siblings play in bands?
Howlin': One. He's my sibling *(points at the guitarist)*.

But you didn't have an older sibling who was in a band?
Nicholaus: You tape stuff from your friends' older brothers' record collections. You run in

beginning, we knew more about how we wanted to sound rather than how to make it sound that way, so we started making up all kinds of rules for the music, like you can't use reverb on the guitar. You can't do this, you can't do that. We forbid a bunch of drum beats as well.
Nicholaus: We almost had nothing.
Howlin': Yeah, like three seconds of music, but the point is that it's not such a bad idea. If you really know what you want to do, then you just try and figure how do what you want to do.

You'd only play a song until you played it well ten times, and then would throw it away? Is that a misquote? It might be…
Nicholaus: We would only play a song ten times before we would record it, because we didn't want to sound too tight. I think it's a good idea, because there is supposed to be energy, and if it's too tight, it sounds like a

Howlin': I mean, we just want it to sound good. The general idea of what a good record sounds like to most people is wrong, pretty much.

What records sound good to you?
Howlin': I notice that most records that I think really sound good are with people playing in the same room together. I like a lot of Phil Spector's stuff, and he's got like 150 people playing, but they're all in the same room together. It makes more sense, if they are good enough musicians. If you are going to overdub everything, like put one thing in at a time, there's no reason to rehearse whatsoever.

In fact, many bands, like the Stooges on their first album, only have a handful of songs when they go in the studio, and make up the rest when they are in there.
Howlin': We don't like that approach at all. We want every record we make to sound like a debut album, because debut albums are



always the best. You should be able to play them tight through and through, and then go in and record them. For some kinds of music, it's better to do it other ways, but this works for us. It's nice how you get the entire picture if you play with all five together, then you can go into the control room and listen to it, and it will sound almost like it will on the record. If you just put the drums on, then you put the guitar on, and then it sounds wrong, you might not have the time to do it again. It just takes a million years for nothing. If you have enough mics, just play.

Someone once mistook you for an ordinary band, and you said emphatically, we are not an ordinary band.

Howlin': What magazine was that from? I know why I said it, but I don't remember where I said it. We're not an ordinary band.

You're not four ordinary guys who picked up instruments, played like hell, and now are touring America?

Howlin': I mean that's sort of the way it works, but we're not an ordinary band in the way... Well, we don't feel we function as most bands do. We don't really believe in the idea that the more you play, the better you get at it. It serves some people well, but you should figure out what you want to do first, so it's in your head, what you want to do, instead of picking up guitars and playing. It's kind of hard to explain. If you start playing and play, play, play, the stuff you do begins to sound the same, and a bit worse than the first time you did it, so you have to sort of figure out what you want to do. We're really uptight about what we do, that's the difference.

Nicholaus: We know what we are doing.

Dr. Matt: It's not like, yeah we're going to get a band together, go on tour, and pick up some chicks. It's not that kind of thing at all. We're doing this to prove a point pretty much.

And what point is that?

Howlin': It's just that we thought there was so much bad music when we got started...

So much bad music?

Howlin': Yeah. There's a lot of good music, but there weren't that many good bands. We sort of thought we'd make three records and quit, because we didn't think we would make any money. What we want to do isn't going to work out, that's what we thought. I guess the world has proved us wrong. We did it just to prove a point, just to prove what music should be, what rock music should sound like.

How does it compare to what the Hellacopters, Glucifer, and Flaming Sideburns are doing?

Howlin': I really like the Flaming Sideburns and the Hellacopters as well, but I don't think that we are doing the same thing that they are doing. We don't add any guitar solos.

Are you consciously doing something in contrast to them?

Howlin': No, those bands weren't around when we started.

But as you grew?

Howlin': But now I think there are a lot of good bands around. We toured with the Hellacopters. Now there are more bands that are like us. I guess it worked or something. Or maybe we just didn't know about all those bands when we formed our band, because we were sort of isolated. When we started doing what we did, we didn't think there were any other bands like us. Now maybe we notice that there's been bands like us all along.

It makes you more aware?

Howlin': Yes, maybe it was just ignorance. We thought, everybody's crap!

But is that attitude essential to make you work hard and make the best music you can?

Howlin': Yeah, I think it's really important to have that.

Dr. Matt: It makes you feel like a team.

Nicholaus: You have to be very prejudiced towards yourself, because if you are like the average disco deadhead, you're not paying any attention at all, and you say, this is good as well as that. You pick up a record at a gas station and think everything sounds the same. Music is like way more important than that. You should be able to discern the good music from the bad music.

You should have a critical ear?

Dr. Matt: You want to be proud of the record you made when you were young even when you get old. Like, I did this, and I am proud of it.

Nicholaus: As opposed to getting a record just to score chicks.

Howlin': We don't really do records to tour, it's really the other way around. We do the records, then tour as a result of it.

Nicholaus: When we started out, we never really wanted this as a job, cause we thought it would ruin everything.

But even though it's not necessarily a 9-5 job, it is work, much like a factory job. Has it begun to lose its joy or fascination for you?

Howlin': Sometimes we feel that way because we do all the extra stuff, like driving in the car, but we sorta have gotten to like that part, but the stuff like the after parties are not important at all. It's the 45 minutes you're on stage that you're doing it for. And when you do a show and it doesn't feel like it clicks, you tend to get really uptight about it and you have arguments after the show. It becomes so important, because if you are driving eight hours and you're away from all your family and on the other side of the world pretty much and you're doing it to play music, then it's really important for you to play that music well and do your best. It's pretty much an ego thing as well, like we always want to be better than the other bands we are playing with. It's something of a competition pretty much.

But when you woo the press and big audiences in places like London, does it just end up making you more uptight?

Howlin': No, we didn't think the record was going to do that well at all. We were just confident that what we did on the record was what we wanted to do. We really didn't think about the fact that people were actually going to buy this record we made. We didn't even think about that at all. We thought it would sell to 1,000 people, and 900 we don't even know, and that was it. The thing is that the music industry is England is really weird, so it's kind of nice to see that from the inside.

Even weirder than the American music industry?

Howlin': It's the weirdest, because it's the homeland of the hype pretty much. They hype a band for two weeks then they cut

them off from the ankles and call them crap. And it's nice to have been that band for two weeks. And if that's weird, than America hasn't really been weird at all.

It's like flavor of the month basically?
Nicholaus: We don't take it too seriously.
Howlin': Yeah, they'll write about a band for three weeks, then they're crap. When we go to England, we think, it's nice that we have been popular in England even though we are just getting popular. You have to think about it in past tense, pretty much. They have so much press, but it doesn't make up for what people really think though. People in Europe read English magazines. But it doesn't matter if the best writers write about you, because you can still be very popular and play big shows in England even though the magazines aren't writing about you.

Now you understand that Adam and the Ants' song, "Press Darling."
Howlin': It's nice that people like us who are important in the music business, but it's just nice that people like us anyways. It doesn't really matter to us if they are important people. It matters to our record company. They care a lot about it. But for us, it's good fun really. We'll see how far it takes us, then we'll see what we're going to do later. It's fun being popular. We didn't want to be rock stars, or whatever you want to call it, like do this for a living. We didn't want to do that at all.

Wait a minute, you didn't want to put a video on MTV?
Howlin': We wanted to make a video because it's kind of a fun thing to do.
Nicholaus: We didn't connect with the fact that it would be playing somewhere. I would have easily settled for CD-Roms, or something that people could see at home on their VCRs, it doesn't matter. You just want to see the results. You want to make a video. We like making videos, and we like making the record covers, and we like making the music. We pretty much want to be in control of everything we do.
Nicholaus: If you like a band, everything about them is important. We do everything we do, including tour, for a reason.

You've said that in other interviews.
Howlin': It's true. When we made the first record, it was just fun for us to make a record because we got to do the cover and we didn't have to pay for the studio. But I think we would have made the record anyway even if we didn't have a record deal, because basically we wanted to make records.

Do your ideas conflict with the label ever?
Howlin': Not really. They are a nice record label.
Nicholaus: They didn't expect us really to sell any records either.
Howlin': Yeah, they were like, let them release records, who cares.

So they were surprised?
Howlin': Yeah, in a lot of ways.

I mean that's sort of the way it works, but we're not an ordinary band in the way...Well, we don't feel we function as most bands do. We don't really believe in the idea that the more you play, the better you get at it. It serves some people well, but you should figure out what you want to do first, so it's in your head, what you want to do, instead of picking up guitars and playing.

But would you have made a video just to make a video?
Howlin': Yeah. I like watching MTV. Would we have done it any ways guys?
Yes *(in unison)*.
I like the idea of a live band. I like watching TV clips with bands I like. I like to look and listen at the same time. The thing is with the punk bands we liked, they had home videos as well. We liked to watch them as well.

When I was a kid, MTV had a show called *120 Minutes* that would show old clips of bands like the Damned, like "New Rose."
I saw that once on a punk special.

It came on once a week.
Howlin': And that was Christmas, but not everybody gets Christmas once a week *(laughs)*! You should be happy. Of course, the record company has all these ideas, like it's going to take the band to the next level or whatever you want to call it, but we made a video just to make a video.



Nicholaus: But they always have to catch up as a company.

So they are always one step behind?
Howlin': Yeah, they always have been.
Nicholaus: That's not a very nice thing to say, but it's pretty much been the case. Like you're not really going to sell any records, but we'll put it out and do some promotion.

Howlin': Which is a nice policy. The policy ends up being that every record basically supports itself. If you want to make a record that no one will listen to, you can get a certain amount of money to make it, and then you can make it, and then enough people will buy it to break even pretty much. Or you're going to make a record that they will think will sell a million, and they'll sink a lot of money into it.

But if they underestimate you, that gives you a lot of freedom?

Howlin': Oh yeah. We might get a problem now, because we are going to make a new record, but they are not involved in any kind of creative process at all. If they are, we'll just cut them out and scream at them.

Nicholaus: Because they've been pretty much one step behind. They always have to catch up and ask, what do these guys think? It's mostly good in some ways. It gives us a psychological advantage over them.

Are the stage choreography and the clothes due to any one person's idea, or does the whole band create the vibe?

Howlin': We've been doing this for so long we know what's in the Hives aesthetic, or whatever you want to call it. If we see something when walking down the street, like a sign, we think, that's Hives. Everybody knows what it is, but we have a hard time explaining it to other people. Sometimes you see something and think, that would go well with The Hives.

You actually point and think, Hives.

Howlin': Yeah, it would work for us.

Are we walking about the English and Italian mod aesthetic of the '60s?

Howlin': It could be pretty much anything, but it's more to do with black and white, because that's what we decided early on, that we would all have black and white clothes. We always wanted to look good. The point is when we started there were a lot of punk places and squats around Sweden with people who were into dressing down, punk, or whatever, so if we dressed really nice, we'd annoy them, because you can annoy punks by dressing nice.

Not unlike the Jam perhaps pissing off people in 1977?

Howlin': Yeah, yeah. It might be the same thing. We were pretty isolated, so it was like 1977. And we sorta think if you are going to put on a show and be in a rock band and all that, it should be like Saturday night, not like Monday morning.

Sly and the Family Stone or Muddy Waters looked good out of a sense of respect for their audience.

Howlin': Yeah. Like the Motown thing. They had charm schools. I always thought Muddy Waters looked the best. He looks great.

You could set up your own Hives school.

Howlin': I also told you about flipping through our parents record collections, because we couldn't afford to buy records. We were like cheapskates. Our dads had old Rolling Stones, the Shadows, and all the 1960s bands that dressed so well.

Tight, skinny trousers.

Howlin': We always like that. So we did it. It served our purpose to annoy the punks as well. It was a lot of fun.

But the Stones went from being an R&B based band to experimenting with both psychedelic rock and even disco, so do you imagine putting out garage rock records in the upcoming years, or changing?

Howlin': It's a tough question. Because maybe you remember our three record plan that we came up with at age 17. That was the first idea we had, just to make three records and have them be the way you want them to be, and then quit. We might lose our heads like all the other bands did and make a few more, but the thing is you have to weigh it all against each other. If you make the same record over and over again, each record will be a little bit worse, at least that's my experience from my record collection. The debut album by somebody is best.

So you're not a fan of 1970s Rolling Stones?

Howlin': Yes, I am though. I love that stuff.

But you're saying that *Exile on Main Street* is not as good as their first record?

Howlin': That's not really what I am saying. Some bands can pull it off and be good and change styles, and that would be a good thing to do, because it doesn't make sense to make the same record over and over because each one will be worse. So of course, we're going to evolve and all that. I definitely see us evolving, because we can't do this forever because we're not going to be able to do it as good in a couple of years, because we've done it for so long we might not be able to keep up the interest in exactly what we do now. I have no idea what it's going to sound like.

Do you believe you are as political as the International Noise Conspiracy in the way that you run your band and lead your life?

Howlin': There is a lot of politics involved in the day to day running of the band. It's really democratic and all that, and everybody gets a say pretty much. In that way, we are a political band, but only in the way that we are political against each other, the way politics works itself out between people. It's just the way we run the band. We don't tell anyone the way we run the band, but maybe we should, and then other people's bands would work better…I don't know. It works for us. We've been doing the band for a long enough time to know what works for us.

You are about to tour Australia, and even though it is an anglo country, does it seem very exotic to you?

Howlin': Yeah. Growing up in Sweden, that's about the farthest place you can go, which always made it interesting for us, and also in terms of the band. When we first started touring, we were really into thinking things like, hey, we're in London, the Rolling Stones used to walk around here. After awhile, it just doesn't make sense. We're in America now, we love American rock'n'roll, so we have this thing where we listen to a record from the town we are going to…

Like Pere Ubu in Cleveland?

Howlin': Nah, Dead Boys. So we're listening to records in every town we go to. I guess we could have listened to the Pagans.

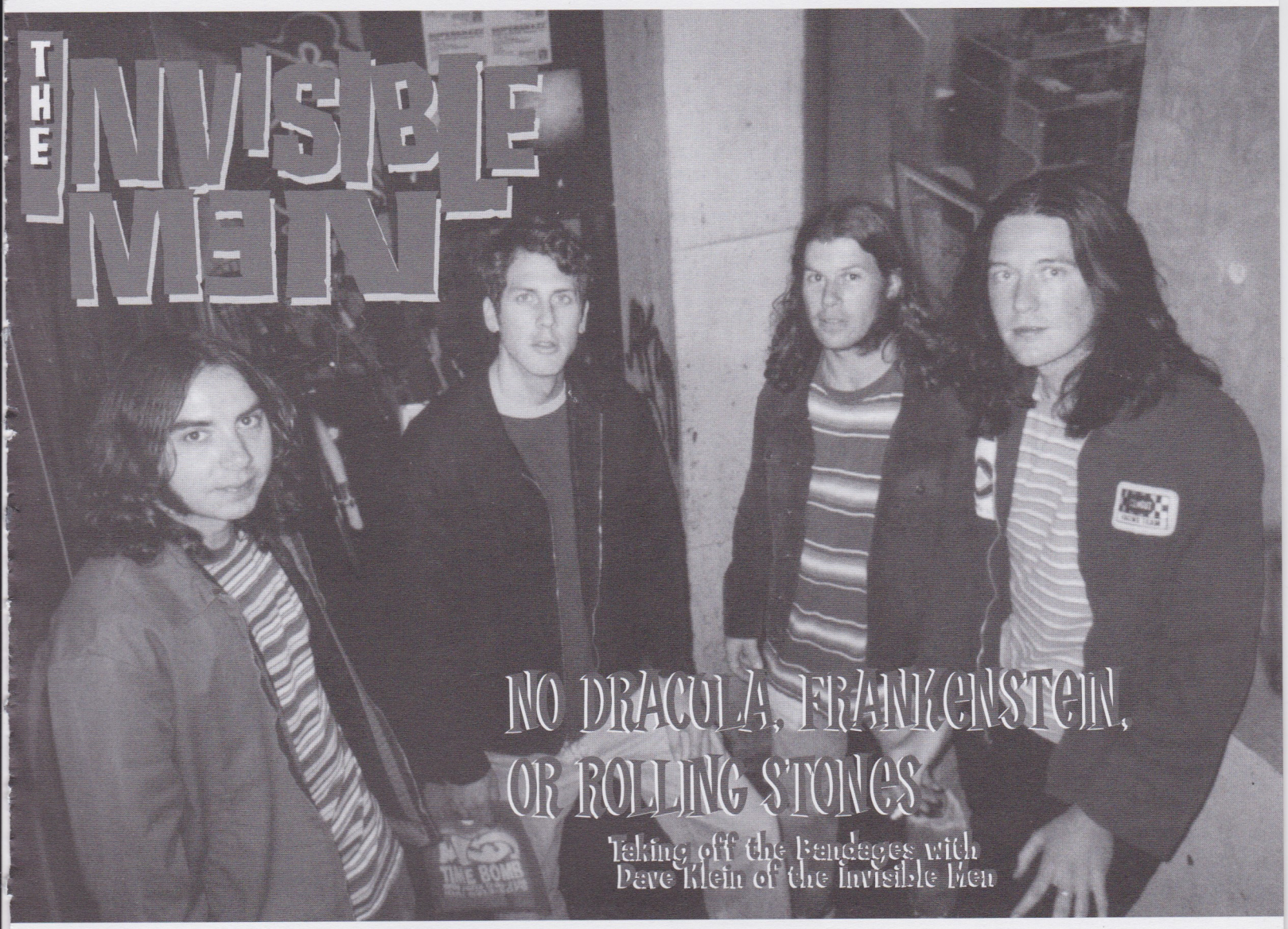
"Street Where Nobody Lives."

Howlin': "Dead End America." So now we're in America and we have all these great records, but when you turn on the radio it's all crap. It's pretty ancient history, all those records. In Ohio, Cheetah Chrome was playing in the club a week after we played, which was kind of neat. The Pagans as well. I was star struck, like today I saw an Oblivians poster in the club. I sorta of get that all the time.

But is that innocence and pure joy essential so you don't become jaded?

Howlin': They are like our idols, basically. We're still very much music fans, because we started as music fans that wanted to do something and be a band that we would like.





THE INVISIBLE MEN

NO DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, OR ROLLING STONES

Taking off the Bandages with Dave Klein of the Invisible Men

First, I have to ask, did you know that Dave Klein is a corrupt cop character created by crime novelist James Ellroy?
Yeah I believe that was in *White Jazz*. That book was based on my life, and a dark life it was, before I took up playing drums in the Witchdoctors. Music saved me.

Why has the band dropped the invisible man movie style bandages in favor of what appears to be pristine Gap T-shirts from the 1980s, or holdovers from the 1970s Zoom show?
It was time to get rid of the schtick. We just wanted to focus on playing and not worry about some stupid gimmick. I've seen bands that worry too much about image and not about the music. Image is important to a certain degree, but it doesn't make you a better musician. It's pretty easy to hide crappy music with gimmicks. Anyone who saw us with the costumes didn't go to see the band for the music. It was hard to play wearing braziers, with goggles fogging up. One time we played a show in Hollywood and this piece of ass girl wearing a teeny tiny skirt was up on the bar dancing and flashing us the goods. None of us saw her because of all the get-up we were wearing. It was at that point we decided we should ditch the costumes. I've been wearing the striped Hang Ten shirts and Converse since I was about fifteen. I guess all those Bruce Brown films and *Brady Bunch* shows rubbed off on us.

Since the Bomboras were affiliated with Dionysus, why did the Invisible Men put out "Who's Sorry Now" on Blood Red?
We were trying to get Lee to put it out at first. He was very hesitant about putting anything out at the time. I wound up talking to Jeff Martin (Blood Red) and mentioned that we were ready to do some recording and to see if he had any interest. Luckily he was going to be out here in LA about a week later, so we met with him and played him a tape of what we had and he loved it. He's a great guy to work with and glad he put out our first CD. The debut of the CD was at the second Las Vegas Grind. That was a great show where we managed to entertain as well as piss a bunch of people off. That's where we hung out with Lee Joseph (Dionysus Records) again. He liked the band and that's that essentially led up to him releasing our second record *Come Get Some*.

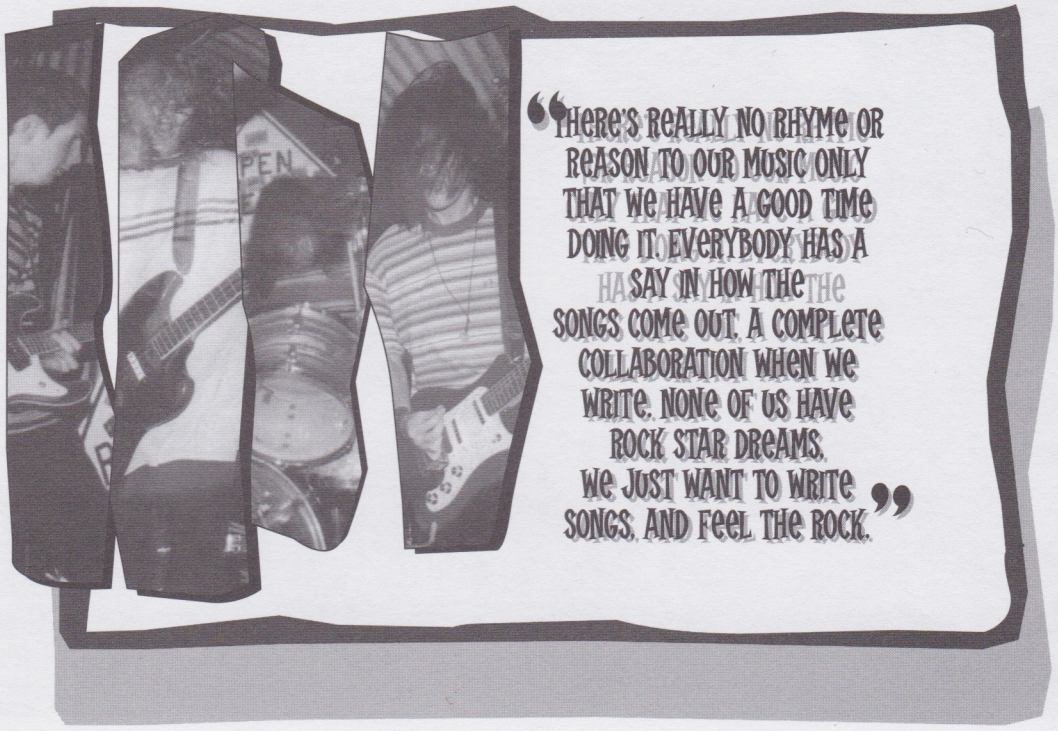
Many people point out the 1960s fuzz rock and the 2½ minute, modish, explosive sound of the band, but what do you hear in the music?
We have all been into the garage, punk and surf bands for years now. It's what we all like. There's really no rhyme or reason to our music only that we have a good time doing it. This band is especially fun for the fact that it's open game on what we play. Everybody has a say in how the songs come out, a complete collaboration when we write. None of us have rock star dreams, we just want to write songs, and feel the rock.

If we could talk a little about the Bomboras… Although by the early 1980s southern California bands like Jon and the Nightmares and the Surf Raiders were playing retro surf music and punk bands like JFA and Agent Orange were playing a hybrid of punk and surf, a lot of people argue that the real big wave of popular surf music didn't happen until the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack was released. Where did the your taste for surf music originate, and how did the Bomboras fit into mid-1990s era?
I heard about surf music in my early teens growing up in the south bay and being a skater and listening to bands like Agent Orange and JFA. Our guitar player Gregg (Lord) Hunt and I grew up in Westchester, home of the Crossfires, the premier surf band of the area 20 years earlier. Gregg had been in a band back in 1988 called the Gallows which did a lot of surf music. We started playing surf music in the Witch-doctors, but it wasn't until forming the Finks, our attempt at being a traditional So-Cal surf band, that the surf sound was a 100-percent. Next came Lord-Hunt and the Missing Finks and eventually the Bomboras. Keep in mind this is still a year before *Pulp Fiction* was released in 1994. Mainstream surf music was still (and I guess still is) the next Taco Bell and Budweiser commercial. When *Pulp Fiction* came out I remember fools making snide comments about us jumping on the band wagon. I don't know how we jumped on the bandwagon when we we're playing this stuff years before. We were into it because we liked it not because it was the next "cool" thing. We just wanted to be in a band playing songs influenced or covered by our favorite bands like the Ventures, the Surfaris, the Kingsmen, and Link Wray (to name a few). Also worth noting is that the Bomboras liked to play garage and frat style '60s music as well as the surf style. So to try to answer your question, I guess you could say the Bomboras were lucky to experience the joy of having an audience during the time they were around. That kind of interest in a kind of music is yet to happen again in L.A.

Like Guitar Wolf and the Demolition Doll Rods, the Bomboras played some shows with the Cramps. How did playing with the Cramps compare to playing with bands like the Trashwomen?
Playing a show with the Trashwomen was like playing with your friend's kick-ass surf band. Playing a show with the Cramps was like playing with the band that's the reason why you took up music and a band in the first place. It was an honor. Both shows were always great, but, with all due respect to the the Trashwomen, playing with the Cramps felt like we actually achieved something. However, one of the best shows I can remember playing was with the Trashwomen at the Chameleon in San Francisco.

Aime from Dionysus once said that during the *Pulp Fiction* period, Dionysus' sales and influence really "peaked, peaked, peaked. The Bomboras really took off and were doing sold-out, really huge shows in LA—like once a week," and compared it to the 1980s Cavern scene and 1960s garage/Sunset Strip periods. Could you describe the vibe or offer some anecdotes that might reveal what was happening during this time?
For some reason people left their houses more than once a month. The Internet wasn't really in full swing at that time. Maybe the Internet porn industry has something to do with it.

How difficult has it been to come out from underneath the shadows of the Bomboras, or have audiences readily taken to the aggressive but tuneful crop of songs and dropped their expectations over the last few years?
Good question. It has been difficult at times, especially when playing for 6 people and the sound guy. Regardless of this, it's still a million times more fun and creative than the Bomboras. We'd rather have the freedom to love the music, playing whatever we'd like than be a part of a band set up like a dictatorship where originality and creativity is punished because it didn't conform to one guy's delusions about music. Few people like what we're doing now because it's basically really different than anything they've heard. We've found that people like what they're familiar with. The Bomboras played familiar tunes. We're more experimental now and push the rock envelope every day. We love the music and we hope people we eventually get hip to the tip.



When the Bomboras signed to Rob Zombie's label, it made some sense, but when he said things like, "The Bomboras could be the next Cherry Poppin' Daddies," did it almost set the band up for failure?
The moment the band became our bread and butter, i.e. touring non-stop, it was the end. Music of that genre, i.e. teenage surf music (and really any good rock'n'roll) should never have aspirations to go further than the scope of fun. Once it becomes work, the fun is over and the music will suffer. Friendships get lost that way. Advice to up coming bands: keep it simple, fun, and don't expect anything from it. Do it for the love of the music only.

He also said, "At just the right moment, surf music was huge." But is it a huge mistake to confuse the music and eras of Dick Dale, Chantays, the Ventures, and the Surfaris with that of Mermen, Los Straightjackets, Man or Astro-Man, the Ghastly Ones, and the Bomboras?
No reason to confuse anybody with anybody else. Know about the bands and their place in the archeological record. First there were dinosaurs then there were cavemen and rock 'n' roll. There are great bands now and it's awesome that people like Eddie Angle still play it. I believe these guys do it for fun and the love of the music. There's a limited (and diminishing) amount of people into this kind of music. I think I'll start a Limp Bizkit cover band soon.



Photos by Antonia Tricarico

Joe, Nicholas Weinrich, Lidia Lally and Wino

BABY STEPS REDEFINED

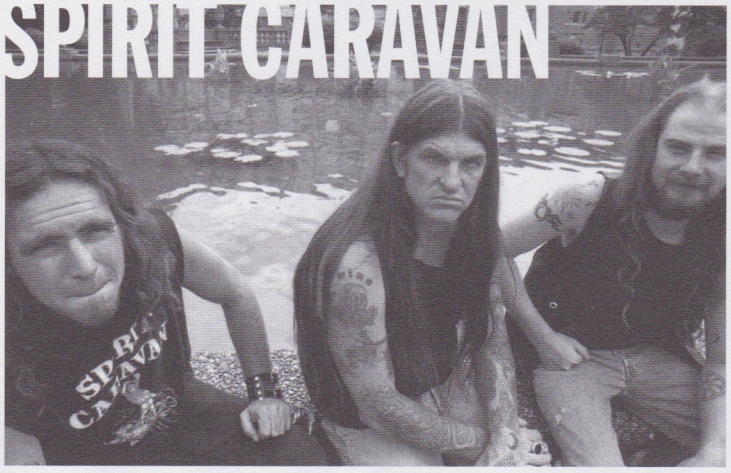
FUGAZI'S JOE LALLY BUILDS TOLOTTA RECORDS | BY MIKE FRAME

Joe Lally digs The Obsessed.

One of the original reasons that he and Ian Mackaye decided to play together was because of their shared love for that fine '80s band. And who can blame them? The Obsessed were fucking great! Heavy, rocking, not quite stupid stoner metal, not quite Dungeons and Druids style heavy metal, they made some of the finest music of the decade. Those riffs and that voice all made by one man, the illustrious Wino, made The Obsessed something truly special. A lot of folks might find it strange that the two founding members of Fugazi would love a heavy rock band like The Obsessed as well as the other things they are into. A lot of people don't have the first clue about loving music that is great regardless of style. That is really the basis of what Joe Lally seems to be doing with Tolotta Records. Putting out records by bands he digs just because he digs em and no one else is gonna do it. Joe is not just a "stoner rock" fan putting out records in his free time away from the bong like some of the fools out there. True Dead Meadow, Spirit Caravan and yes, The Obsessed could all probably fall under the heading of that stupidly named musical category if you were so inclined, I suppose. But they are all heads and shoulders above the latest batch of stoned kids stealing riffs from Kyuss, Fu Manchu and Queens Of The Stone Age. These bands roots stretch back to long forgotten (and great) bands like Sir Lord Baltimore, Cactus, Pentagram, Blue Cheer and the Groundhogs. That's the difference between an exciting and boring band; you take your deep roots in the history of great music and bring in your own style. Joe digs what Wino does, be it The Obsessed, St. Vitus, or now in Spirit Caravan. He just digs GOOD music, period. Spirit Caravan is the logical next step for what Black Sabbath, Blue Cheer, and Sir Lord Baltimore started and their pummeling heavy riffs are so inspired and rocking, it kills me. Then Wino's classic voice over the top of that great rhythm section who are tight enough to nail it down but loose enough to let the songs breathe. My favorites of the bunch are Dead Meadow. Coming on like a sublime mixture of Hawkwind's spaciness and the Groundhogs blues inspired madness, this band adds their own twist and then takes you for the ride. This shit is MADE for headphones!! Both the self-titled debut and the more recent *Howls From The Hills* show that these folks know what they are doing.

How did you initially get turned on to this kind of heavy rock stuff that you're releasing?

Well, I grew up listening to funk and soul music. My neighbors next door, there were four boys and their whole family was into James Brown and Otis Redding, that kinda stuff. I actually went to a lot of shows with them. I saw the Jackson 5, the Spinners, the Four Tops. My first arena show was seeing the bass player from Sly and the Family Stone, Larry Graham's band, Graham Central Station. Anyway, I was out kinda late that night so after that my dad said no more concerts. Then in junior high, I got into Led Zeppelin. They came through in 1977 and by then I couldn't even pretend to go to anything like that. Once I was actually into Aerosmith, and Zeppelin and Sabbath and stuff like that, I couldn't even think about going to see them because of my dad. It wasn't until high school that I got to see some of these bands. I remember seeing Rush in there somewhere. So, I was getting into some of the heavier stuff and then in high school I was in Art Class with the drummer from The Obsessed. At the time they were a four piece with a lead singer and they were doing Sex Pistols and Damned covers. I was getting into punk at the time and I just couldn't fathom them doing these metal originals that they were doing along with this punk stuff. Then I went and saw them, they were opening for the Dead Boys, and they were just kind of hard to deny. I was from Rockville in the suburbs of D.C., so people doing those songs as covers and playing this heavy rock stuff wasn't that weird to me, whereas a lot of the punks were like "What is this?" But they were kind of diggin' it too and as time went on, more and more people came out to see them. They lost their singer and started to write more original sounding stuff. It got its own thing going when they became a three piece with Wino singing. I lived with Wino at that point, about 1984. I had a job where I got up early in the morning and I would literally fall asleep to The Obsessed playing. I just kind of absorbed it into my bloodstream or something. It was really no different than getting into Sabbath. I would always make tapes for people and things like that. Then Wino left to go to California to sing for St. Vitus and it was hard for me to get into St. Vitus because I knew all the original Obsessed songs that he had written that hadn't come out. Hellhound Records finally put some of that stuff out in 1990 and he reformed the band. Then they got signed to a major label (Columbia Records who released the brilliant *The Church Within* in the early '90s) and all of that. When he came back to live in this area I had only put out a few singles at that point. He asked me to put out a single for Spirit Caravan and then he asked me to do the full length. I felt like "I have to do this, so now I have to figure out how to put out CDs." It was a whole new thing as well as a whole new genre of music, I'm still trying to figure it out. What I am doing right now is trying to get the records into chain stores, which is proving to be very difficult. I wanted to be able to do a label to help someone who really needed it and who had done music that I had loved for so long and I just felt like I had to do whatever I could to help him. It's hard, I definitely don't like having to deal with the aspect of what it takes to get records into chain stores, but I know that their audience will go to chain stores to buy it. You have to get into the business and I don't really care for it, it's the biggest turn off of doing the label. It's up to the band to decide the way they wanna do things and it's a little harder to do things that way. But a band like Dead Meadow, I can understand them wanting to go that route, so I am trying to go in that same direction with them. Other bands don't wanna do it that way and that's nice for me because I can just enjoy putting it out.



A few contacts for smaller distributors who will carry it and it is available from Dischord. They can just do the distribution for me and that's the way I would love to work.

So you're shooting for putting out stuff that you like, rather than a certain style of music?

Yeah, it's really hard. I just can't afford to put out all the stuff that I would like to. People ask me to do stuff but I just have so much stuff coming out. I definitely don't need to have demos sent to me *(laughs)*.

How has the response been to some of the heavier stuff that you've put out? Do you find that some folks that generally wouldn't be into this stuff are liking it and getting turned onto something new?

In the case of Dead Meadow, yeah. I have had to pursue different kinds of distribution that moves this kind of music. So, in the case of Dead Meadow I have noticed a lot of people getting into it. Spirit Caravan is another story. It's more like the people who are into that scene are seeking it out and I am trying to meet up with them. There are people in my more immediate community who understand how I came to putting that stuff out, but it's definitely interesting seeing a whole different network. There is an underground heavy rock community but it's not as organized as the punk scene. I haven't even really tapped into what that scene really is. I would like to hope that I could exist outside of that as more of an online thing, do a lot of online sales. I'm still trying to figure out how to let people know about it, it's definitely an interesting challenge.

Does the Internet help as far as the label goes?

In my case yeah. I certainly don't think there's a name for this kind of music, but there is a stoner rock/doom metal website and a lot of people write to me about all kinds of things because Tolotta is on their link section. People know that it is Spirit Caravans' record label. So there are all kinds of people that contact me from all over the world, someone in Greece doing a small distribution, that type of thing. I don't know if these people would have ever heard of me otherwise. I have had people write to me from Cuba, which is really bizarre. So, it has definitely helped me a lot.

Maybe reissuing the Obsessed stuff helped more of those people find out about you, that stuff was impossible to find for years...

Yeah, a lot of people know about that record, but there still needs to be some advertising, some kind of a push from me. It was originally on Hellhound Records then the rights were sold and Wino and I were both just hoping that no one was gonna give us a hard time about it. The thing just wasn't out there, and I knew people really wanted it. It's not the kind of thing I expected to make any money on, I just wanted it to be available, period. Hopefully people will start noticing it in the Tolotta ads. People are trying to get me to reissue some of the other stuff as well, but I am a little more hesitant about that. I don't know who owns the rights and I don't wanna get caught up in all that hassle. Hopefully the contracts will expire and I can just have it available. I just want Wino's stuff to be available to people in a way that he can get paid for it. He's never really gotten any money for any of the stuff he's done.

What are the current plans or goals for the label at this point?

Really just to get out the new Spirit Caravan and Dead Meadow records out to as many people as possible. I am just keeping my fingers crossed that all the work we have done is gonna get it to people. Hopefully you can find it at Tower for example. I'm still trying to figure out why it's so damn hard to get records into a place like that.

We embarked on a tour of the US and Japan earlier this year when our latest record the name rings a bell that drowns out your voice was released on Painted Sky Discs in Japan and Portland based label In Music We Trust in the US. With these two things and a spot on SXSW representing three of the more concrete opportunities we have been able to cultivate for ourselves to date, we thought, "If there was ever a time to sink the rest of our life savings into the pursuit of indie rock, this is probably it."



Knievel

Knievel in a Neutra House - Early in the tour knievel had a day off in LA and went to the Neutra Research House in Silverlake to soak up it's harmonious vibrations. (From left to right - Wayne, Dave, Other Dave and Tracy.)

Add some assistance from the Australian government, and the four of us - Wayne, Dave, Other Dave and I, leave for San Fran on March 5. Our first show is at Berkeley where we play to a few people and meet some nice folks and get paid eleven dollars, which almost, but not quite, pays for our beer. Two days later we play the Café Du Nord in San Fran with two great bands - My Morning Jacket and Swearing At Motorists. We enjoy our set and the loan of their audience. My Morning Jacket play one of those incredible shows where you feel like you are possibly witnessing something historic. No one in Australia to my knowledge is currently doing big southern Lynyrd Skynyrd rock with heaps of reverb on the vocals and a touch of boogie.

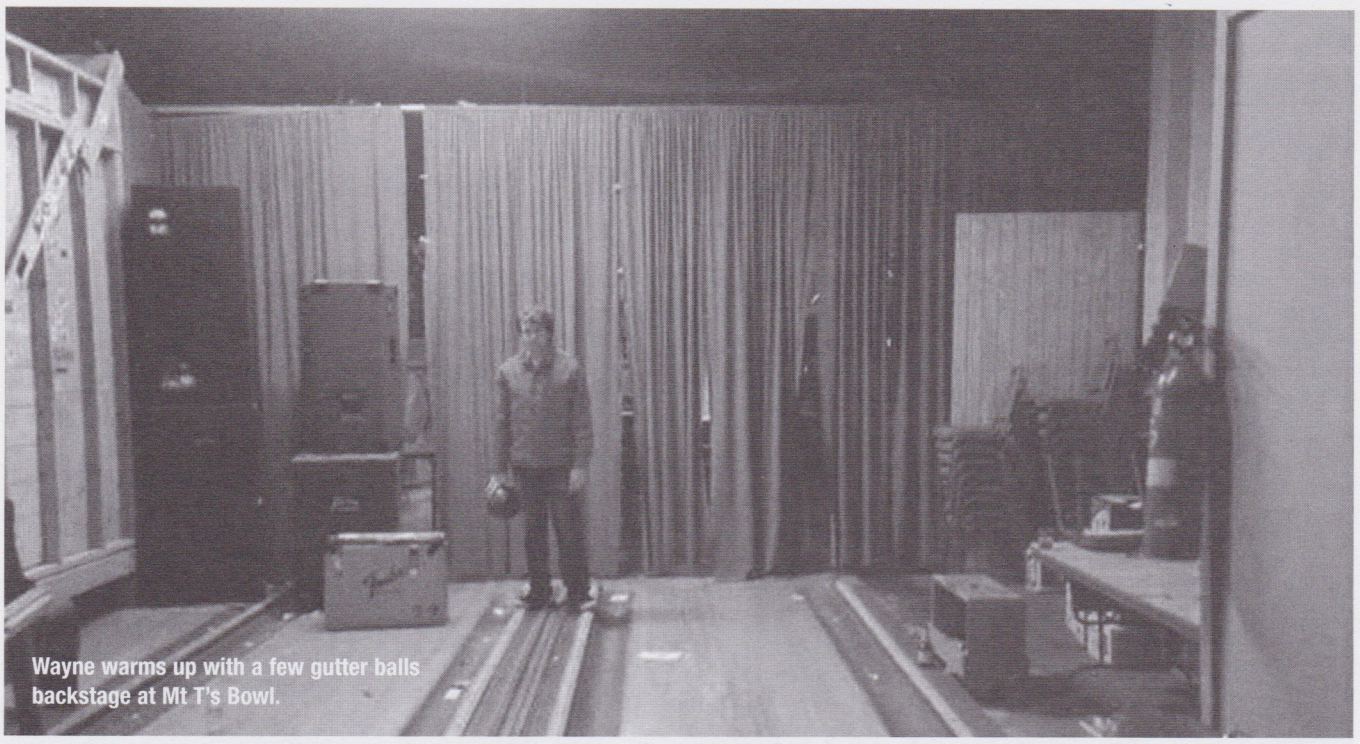
The next day we drive to LA. We are squashing ourselves into a Chevy Blazer cos it's a hundred dollars a weak cheaper than a mini-van. Apparently driving a Chevy Blazer doesn't have the same credibility as an Econoline and some cool band person nearly crushes our big American tour spirit with his comment "You're driving around in this? Have you ever heard the phrase 'Soccer Moms'?" The drive to LA is memorable for the stench of the giant abattoir you pass on the way that we later learn is known as 'Cowshwitz'.

We arrive at Paul from Better Looking Records' house in Sherman Oaks. He is Ritchie Cunningham/Li'l Opie incarnate and his hospitality, like everyone we stay with, is overwhelming. He hands us a Miller - "the champagne of beers", as we walk in the door and becomes one of the many people who have made large deposits in the favour bank that they will be able to cash in if they ever make it down to Australia

Our next show is at Mr T's bowl – it's a casual affair. We drive out there not really knowing if we've got a spot. We hang around and watch other bands arrive and ask one – Gram Rabbit, if we can borrow some of their gear in the event that we do actually get a spot. They graciously oblige and it turns out the guitarist is an ex-Melbourne boy. Mr T's Bowl is in fact an old bowling alley. The owner tells us that it wasn't making any money and someone came to him with an offer to put bands on and feeling at a loss about what else to do, he said 'sure' and they just ripped out all the scoring booths, packed up all the balls, pins and bowling shoes in cardboard boxes, piled everything up on the lanes and built a little stage in front of the mess and put curtains at the side. It makes for a great and unusual atmosphere and is one of the more memorable venues we've played but it felt kind of sad to be sitting backstage on a beautifully crafted wooden bowling lane with your feet in the gutter, changing your strings with stuff piled up around you like a demolition site.

We finish at 2am and have to drive about an hour back to Pauls' at Sherman Oaks and then leave at 4am for the airport for our 7:30am flight to Austin. We don't sleep - we use the hour at Paul's to shower and pack and diligently arrive at the United counter with the two hours required for their stepped up security. The check-in crew show their appreciation by charging us $75 (AU$150) for excess baggage and not feeding us on the plane. I mean it's not that I love airline food – but, you know, it's a tradition that they give you something to poke at with your plastic fork to pass the time if your flight is over an hour long. I relate this complaint to someone who is in a US band but he seems not to hear and just looks at us in awe and says "you guys are flying?"

When we finally arrive at Austin, Chris Mc Farland – a singer songwriter and labelmate on In Music We Trust, is waiting for us holding up a little bit of lined notepaper with 'knievel' written in biro. He escorts us to his beautiful blue Econoline in the car park and I show my gratitude by immediately curling up in the back seat and falling asleep. When we arrive at his house I manage to utter a few monosyllabic responses before curling up and falling asleep in what I later learn used to be his grandma's rocker/recliner, which is appropriate given how old I feel. He takes us to register at the convention centre and I sleep in the van on the way there, and on the way back – then we go out to eat and I manage to stay awake and keep my face out of



Wayne warms up with a few gutter balls backstage at Mt T's Bowl.

my food but as soon as we get back to his place I fall asleep in the recliner again. When I wake up, his girlfriend Kelly has joined us and the six of us head into town to take in some SXSW rock action. It is very exciting – so many bars and venues and bands... so we go see My Morning Jacket again. They are playing at an excellent venue called Buffalo Billiards and during their set I keep glancing at this guy in front of me in the audience cos he looks sort of familiar and eventually he turns to me and says "Are you in a band called Knievel?" and I say "Yeah – where do I know you from?" It is Dean Wareham from Luna – we supported them when they played in Australia a couple of years ago. Any credible indie rock fan would recognize Dean Wareham from like, a thousand paces. I look at Wayne who is behind me and witnessed the whole embarrassing exchange. He just rolls his eyes, shakes his head and says, "Where do I know you from…"

We play the next night at Maggie Mae's. I'm getting into the Austin vibe and have the urge to don a cowboy hat and boogify all the knievel songs but instead we play our own brand of uptight aussie indie pop to an appreciative crowd. Dave from Swearing at Motorists who are from "Dayton Fucking Ohio Motherfucker," which, judging by his enthusiasm for it must be a really great place to live, turns up to our show and tells me they have been listening to our cd on the drive down from San Fran and they really like it. He qualifies this by saying, "And we're real assholes when it comes to music" which I don't doubt for a second. After our show we go across the road to see them play. They are rockin' hard and all the MMJ folk are up the front getting into it. For his last song Dave throws his guitar and lands a direct hit on Wayne's forehead. He is incredibly remorseful and Wayne, who is still conscious but has completely stolen the limelight with the growing crowd of concerned people around him, keeps holding a towel to his profusely bleeding head and insisting he is fine but we don't believe him and neither do the people at the hospital who give him four stitches and notes on the treatment of concussion.

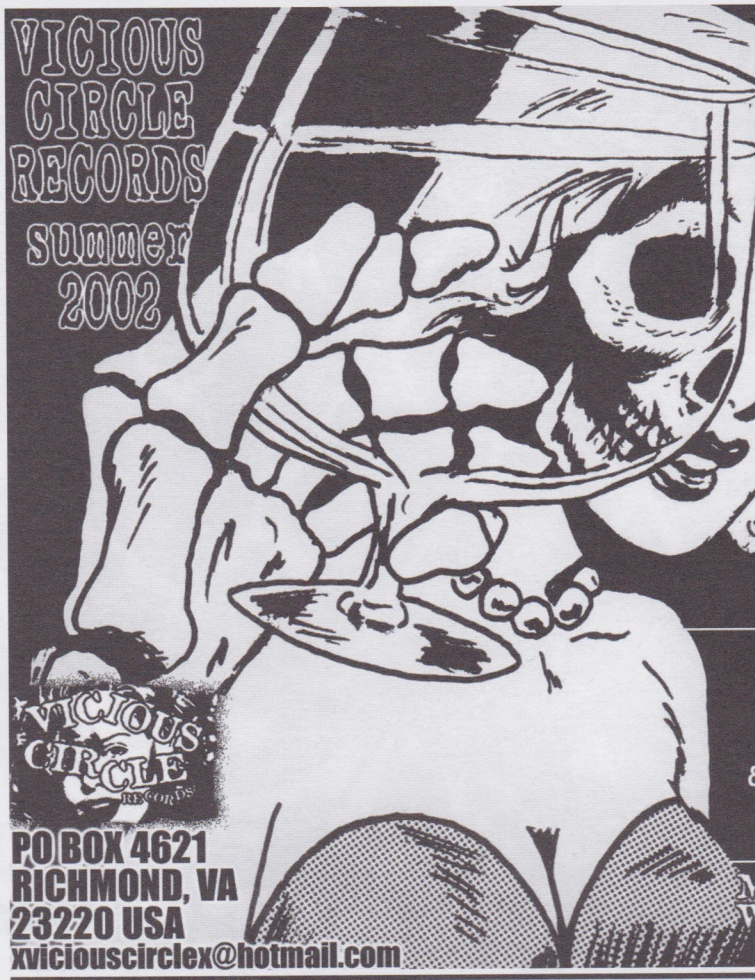
After one more night of taking in the joys of SXSW we are back in LA. We have tickets to the last two nights of All Tomorrows Parties and float as if in a dream world through sets by Big Star, Wilco, Stereolab and Sonic Youth.

Our next gig is in LA at the Silverlake Lounge. Patrick Park opens and every A & R person has dropped in to see him, or possibly just to see which other A&R people are there. We thought we were on next, supporting local band Sunstorm but being a Monday night it seems Sunstorm have decided to take the middle spot and get an early night. Their crowd leaves with them and we pretty much play to no one except a few friends and two guys who tell us that they just looked us up on the web and downloaded our mp3s that day. We wonder if they think it would be weird if we hugged them.

Next we fly to Seattle and spend the first night catching up with our friends Ken and Babs. We imbibe some red wine and later Babs takes us to meet her friends who are A&R folk visiting Seattle to size up a band. They saw the band earlier and are now living it up drinking twelve year old Chartruese in a quiet bar and, I guess because they can, they invite us to join them. Everything gets blurry as we go to one bar then another in search of the evil green liquid that has unpredictable effects on people. When the bars close we head back to their swanky hotel for the continuing party. Other Dave is wearing the hotel's white towelling bathrobe and ordering room service, at least one of our band members is being sick in the generously proportioned hotel bathroom and I am possibly hallucinating as everything around me starts to resemble a Roman Polanski film. Fuelled by images of Rosemary's Baby, I eventually round up the others, clutching at shirt collars and bathrobes, corral us into the hallway, that seems to grow longer as we lunge down it towards the door, and push everyone into the elevator which closes just in time as imaginary A& R people chase us down the corridor with their chartreuse colored eyes. We escape to our borrowed beds in a house on Capitol Hill just before sunrise and I am woken just after sunrise by the house cats. They are working in a tag team - one sitting on my chest pawing my face to make me open my eyes, the other on top of the covers trying to capture my toes when they wriggle underneath. That night we stumble somewhat too soberly though our show at the Crocodile…

Next is Eugene and Portland which marks the start of a rigorous schedule that sees us playing something like 15 shows in 16 days before heading to Japan…

For more unromantic road stories in demystifying detail – plus photos! visit the knievel website: www.knievel.com.au.

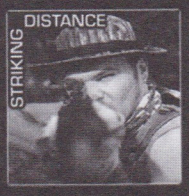


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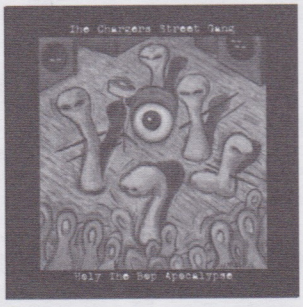
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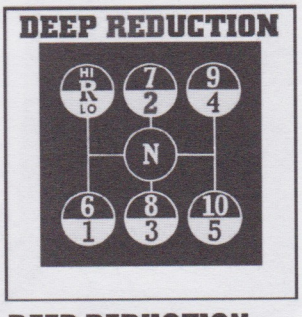
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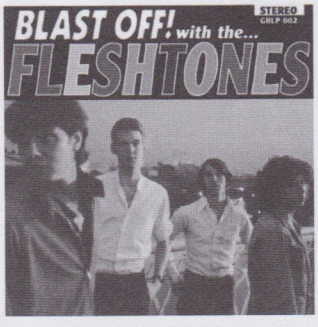
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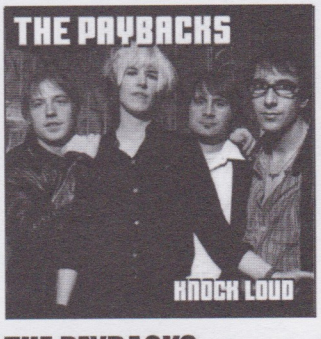
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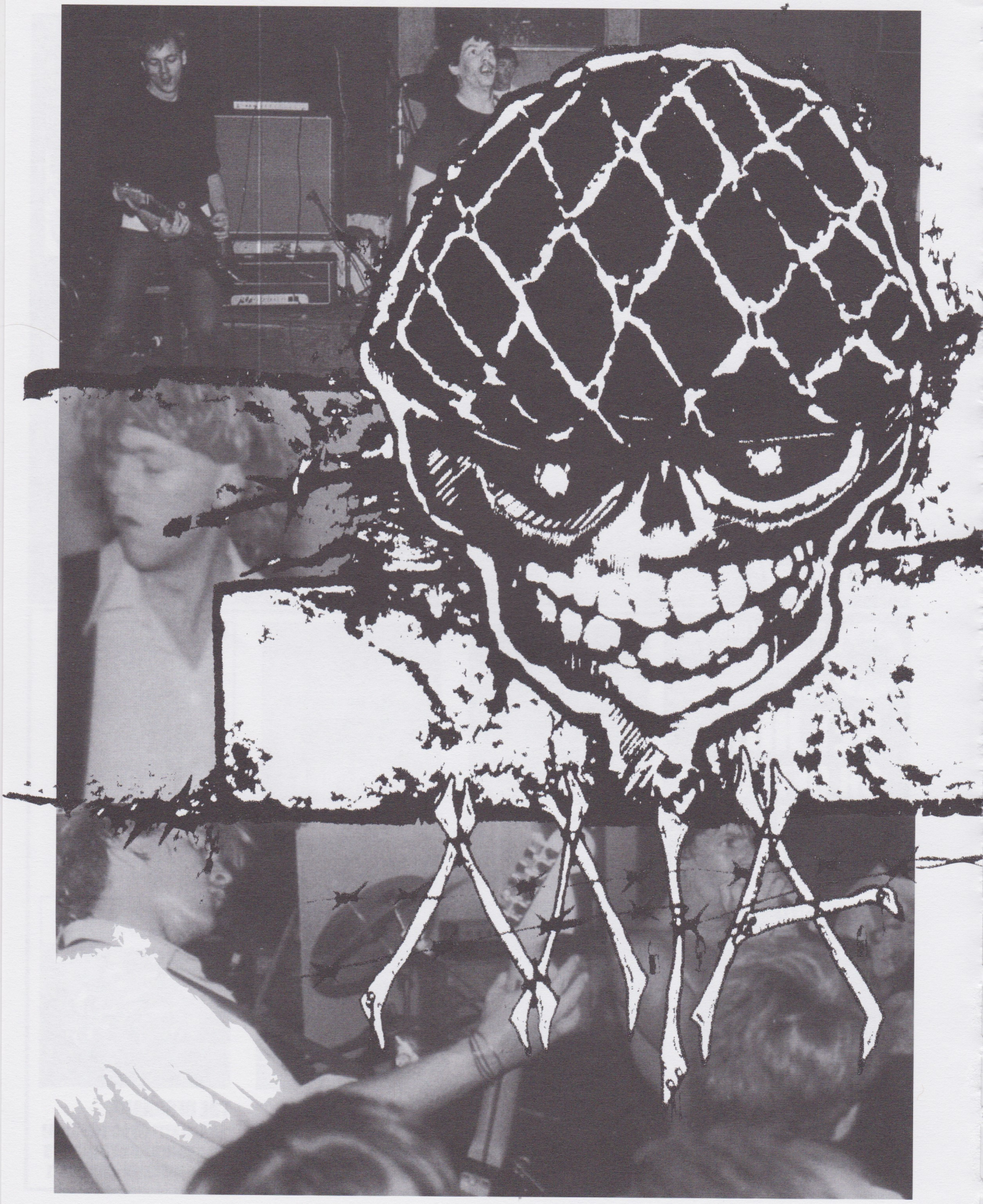
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MIA Interview by Matt Van Mantgem

While the worldwide punk scene that exploded in the 1970s has been lauded, usually, the early '80s are dismissed as being about brainless thugs from the suburbs. While I didn't crash at the Zero, and party at the Masque, I did sing at Fender's Ballroom, dance at Safari Sam's, hang out at Godzilla's, and laugh at the Cuckoo's Nest. One band in the thick of that scene was M.I.A.. In that era of Gary Tovar's Goldenvoice productions, M.I.A. were seemingly everywhere. They've been gone, now, for many years, and much of the recordings are even out of print, but thanks to the internet (www.miaband.com), and the Lost Boys compilation on Alternative Tentacles, the excellent music they produced is still available. Catch up with Nick Adams, a humble, but underrated guitar player who played the soundtrack to my lost youth.

MIA came out of the Las Vegas scene around 1980. The scenes in New York, London, and Los Angeles are well documented, and the history well preserved. But, what was it like to be a Punk in Las Vegas in 1979? Did you feel like you had an independent thing going on, or were you more following what was going on in the larger scenes?

My recollection is that while we were in Vegas we were following the larger scenes, especially the LA scene. There really weren't many punks around at the time, and most of the shows were backyard parties. It was a real small scene.

My recollection of Los Angeles from about that time is similar. Most of us in the suburbs were just following what was happening in Hollywood, and some of us were even starting a kind of "cult" to Darby Crash, so I'm thinking it was doubly so all the way out in Vegas- a sense of complete isolation, like you're really "doing your own thing." Was it something like that, or was it more just waiting for the latest development from the coast?

Kind of a tough question. The first punk show I attended that I didn't play at was Black Flag at the Santa Monica Civic, and I hadn't yet played any shows outside of Vegas. It was an eye-opener to say the least. There were a lot of punks there, a lot of energy. Personally, I was a late-comer to the Vegas punk scene, so I missed some of the earliest shows in Vegas by the out-of-town bands. I think the Simpletones played there in '79, for instance. I think Mike and Chris had been to shows in California, and I remember Mike telling me about Darby's death, news from the latest *Flipside*. The first time I met The Swell (MIA before I joined), they had a rehearsal space next to mine. There was a giant Union Jack painted across one entire wall, and I remember the energy of the music really struck me. I had heard punk rock before, but never live. It was so raw and powerful. And there was an attitude that was alluringly dangerous. Hard to explain, but it was cool. Mike asked me to jam with them, and I jumped at the chance. Mike turned me on to a lot of punk music.

Later, MIA was based around Orange County, and shared bills with most, if not all the bands that are remembered for the "OC" scene. What prompted the move there, and how do you see MIA as fitting into that scene?

For personal reasons in January of '81 I left the band and moved to San Diego. It had nothing to do with the band, I just felt like I had to get out of Vegas. A little later, Mike and Chris moved to OC. I moved there in June and we started playing again. The Cuckoos' Nest was our "school" at the time. It was just an awesome place, a little scary and dangerous, a murky, beer-soaked dive. We saw all the best bands of the time play there, and a lot of bands no one remembers. Just watching Greg Hetson (Circle Jerks) play was, for me, a big influence. Being in the punk scene at that time, and later, was a constant battle for respect. Coming from Vegas, we were outsiders, so it was hard to get any attention or respect. We went into a studio with $300 that bought us six hours of 8-track time and recorded the demo that was released as *Last Rites*. It's funny, we had to go to Reno to get noticed. Reno had one of the best scenes anywhere.

Would this be the "Skeeno" scene of 7 Seconds fame? If so, were you involved with the whole "Positive Force" thing?

Yeah, it was the Skeeno scene. We gave a tape of our demo to Kevin and he passed it on to Tim Yohannan, who passed it on to Bo Clifford at Bomp who passed it on to Felix at Smoke Seven and before we knew it we had songs on three records. So really we have Kevin to thank. I didn't really consider us to be directly involved with the "Positive Force" or the "Straight Edge" movements, but we played with a lot of those bands. We were a positive band for the most part and I think we drew many of the same people at our shows. Some of those bands had very loyal followings and exerted a lot of influence in the way of behavior and dress. I don't think we ever did that.

That OC scene, many would contend, has given birth to the late '90s "Pop Punk" scene. Since MIA had a sound that was melodic, and while aggressive and fast, never really became "thrash," I wonder what you think of the Blink 182's and Offsprings of the world? Also, while you've made it clear that there is no planned reunion, do you think that MIA would have a place on, say, a Warped tour?

Blink 182 and Offspring? Well, I like some of their music, and I say more power to 'em. They exist in a completely different milieu, though. I mean, I don't think we ever played

to more than 1000 people, maybe 2000 tops. And we sold maybe 20-30,000 records total in our career. And we're talking vinyl. Those bands are firmly in the mainstream with lots more resources in production, performing, etc., and selling MILLIONS of albums. There are other bands that came after us that were more pop-punk oriented, like Big Drill Car. Those guys would probably be big if they were still around. For us to go on a Warped tour, well that would be warped. I can't even imagine it.



There's a lot of progression between records with MIA. Murder in a Foreign Place seems like a very political, and very Punk record, while Notes from the Underground has more personal themes, and seems more post-punk with different song structures, and less reliance on loud/fast, and After the Fact seems even more concerned with personal relationships, and has even less of the hard and fast songs. Was there a reason for this?

I think it was a reflection of the progression of our tastes and talents. *The Last Rites* disc was very punk-influenced. It was what we were listening to. When MIA took an amicable break in '81–'82, Paul and I started a punk/funk band with an artist/sax player, Bad Otis Link. It was a very free-form band, we all sang, and we played shows with some of the "alternative" punk bands like the Minutemen and Meat Puppets, but also with the likes of DOA, Social Distortion and Circle Jerks. I think when we got back into MIA for the *Murder* record we were listening to everything from Motown, blues and jazz to the Birthday Party, Bauhaus and Angry Samoans. It might not be something you would pick up on listening to our music, but our musical influences became very wide. *Murder in a Foreign Place* was written while I was really into Tom Waits' *Swordfish Trombones* album. Is it punk? Well, maybe the lyrics. "Las Vegas" was a cover tune lifted and twisted off a Petula Clark album. Mike came up with the good arrangement. One of the best songs, "Used to Know Me," is in 7/8 time, not exactly your standard punk time signature. *Notes From the Underground* could have been a great record, but we had a lot of turmoil making it. Lots of pressure from inside and outside the band, and we made some bad decisions. We actually broke up while recording it. For me it's not a happy record. I much prefer the 4-track versions of some of that album's songs that appear on *Lost Boys.* I wasn't involved in *After the Fact,* except maybe as fertilizer and fodder for some of the songs (Mike would probably tell you that it's my imagination). It is a really good record, though, and I think Mike really grew as a songwriter and came into his own.

I don't think he had ever worked with a punk band before. I remember he made my guitar sound like that '70s band Boston and we had to tell him to back off the Boston shit.

Wow! No offense, but I never would have guessed about the Tom Waits, and Petula Clark! I'm of the opinion, though, that the music M.I.A. made was really musically sophisticated, much more so than bands considered more mainstream. Is there anything left in the vaults then? Any surprises?

Well, you should try to find the Petula Clark version of that song. It is classic Rat Pack-era Vegas material. When we toured across the country supporting the *Murder* record, we listened to Steel Pulse *True Democracy* non-stop so we had to write a reggae tune. It was pretty decent, but we never performed it very well. And when we were stuck in Baltimore for a week there were some kids in the 'hood, break dancers, who were very impressed that we had a Grandmaster Flash tape; instant friends. I think that the attitude that defined our time, the "punk" attitude, is found in music all through history, sometimes it just takes a while to learn that. I don't think there are any more surprises from the vault, but you never know.

I remember somebody saying that "MIA" stood for "Mike In Action," so was that the case? Was it Mike's baby, and he felt that it should be more concerned with personal stuff, or was it more a case of wanting to say other things besides commentary on issues of the day with the whole band? In other words, did everybody feel like they were growing out of the earlier stuff, or was it less progression, and more just a change?

We used to make up stuff like that because people would ask us what MIA meant, like it had to mean something other than the obvious! But Mike was definitely the driving force of the band. He's a really complex guy, one of the most talented and artistic people I know. He can be difficult to get along with, because his personality is so strong, but I think that's what makes his songwriting great. I think if you look at Mike's songs on the whole, you'll find that they are more personal, even the stuff on *Last Rites* and *Murder*. He just got better over time, in fact some of his post-MIA stuff is really great. In my opinion it's the personal stuff that stands the test of time. I think we all had strong contributions to the band, though.

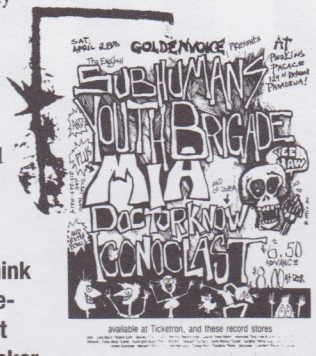
Is there anything you want to convey to people who might discover MIA, today? I believe that the music holds up, and it continues to inspire me, but do you think it

does, as well?

Does the music hold up? It's hard for me to say. We never were and never will be a huge influence on the music scene. We were there, though. If anything, *Lost Boys* is a document of that fact, and I would encourage listeners to treat it as such.

The Lost Boys release on Alternative Tentacles has come out years after you've all moved on to other projects, so how did that come about?

A couple of years ago punk was making a comeback. There was some interest in some of the older bands, and we were contacted by a couple of different labels about re-releasing the material. We just didn't find anyone to work with that we felt comfortable with, so we shelved it. A while later AT called, and they had been very fair to us in the past. Mike didn't really want to put some of the *Last Rites* and other stuff on *Lost Boys* because he felt it wasn't our best music. And while I agreed, I felt it that it might still be appreciated by students of the old school, and for that reason I thought it was important. For instance, "Atomic Bomb" is, to me, a classic. I wish we had a great recording of it, but we don't. The only way anyone would ever hear it was if we put a sub-standard recording of a sub-standard performance on *Lost Boys*. Was it the right thing to do? I don't know. If we only put our best songs on it, it would be a five-song compilation. Mike was a good sport about it.









Five Songs? I don't think so. I think it was Tom Waits who said something about music sounding best when played on a burnt out speaker half a block away. I don't mind twisting my ear to try to hear music if it's really good, and that's a really good song. Don't you think that you guys had an influence on some of what came later? I really think that you did, and I'd think that people would be well advised to give your stuff a listen, even if it's a "substandard" recording. But, was that a big difficulty for you? I think that people have forgotten just how difficult it was to book recording time, and get a decent recording "back in the day." Could you describe how the recording process went for you?

Recording was always a big expense. Being in a band *period* is a big expense. There's always equipment to buy, drum sticks, guitar strings. I think we got lucky when we first went into the studio. We found a local studio, JEL, where this guy Bill Trousdale was an engineer. We told him we wanted to just put down as many songs as we could live, and go back to do overdubs if we had time. I don't think he had ever worked with a punk band before. I remember he made my guitar sound like that '70s band Boston and we had to tell him to back off the Boston shit. But he was great, and he made us sound pretty darn good on the Last Rites stuff, all done in just a few hours. I remember they had a booth with a card table, a chair, a set of headphones and a script. It was where Mel Blanc was recording voices for Bugs Bunny cartoons! So I guess Bill had to really switch gears when we came in. Before we recorded *Murder* we went into an 8-track studio and made a tape that just stunk. Basically we got what we paid for. With the *Murder* record we took a little more time, maybe over-produced it a bit. Bill was at the controls again. Mike and I were listening to it while working on *Lost Boys*, and we were trying to figure out how to take some of that reverb off. *Notes from the Underground*, as I said before, was a total disaster. We had a big-name producer who didn't really like the band, didn't put out much effort, and it showed. Not much love in that recording. We got slammed back then and the material still gets slammed in reviews of Lost Boys, but I think it is some of our best stuff. Now I can sit here and pound out tunes on my computer and they sound great. Multitrack, 16-bit with effects. The change in technology is just amazing.

Speaking of those other projects: what is everybody doing these days? Is everybody still involved with music?

I don't know what Mike and Larry are doing musically. I know they still play. Chris is playing with the 7 Outs, an old school band in Vegas with some of the original Vegas punks. Check out our website for a link and some mp3s. They are really good. Paul is playing with a band called the Western Bone Cleavers. He plays guitar and sings, and the style is very eclectic. We'll have something from them soon on the website, I think. About all I do is play my acoustic and sing a little in my spare time, which is not much.

You've moved on to do some photographic work. Do you find that you're doing the same art in a different medium, or would it be more of a completely different thing?

I wouldn't say it's the same art, but it is the same motivation. It's the same satisfaction of creation, you know. It makes me happy, keeps me learning and growing. At the risk of sounding obtuse, I think there are many opportunities for creativity in life, be it as a chef in the culinary arts or as a carpenter building things. Some of us have the need or desire for that expression of creativity, and how we manifest it, well that's a matter of our life experiences and the opportunities we follow.

Indeed! So, what was the experience and/or opportunity that led you into Photography?

I didn't have much in the way of experience, but I had some aptitude. Fresh out of college with a BA in Anthropology I was working in a cabinet shop and hoping to attend graduate school. I took a part-time entry-level job at the local paper. I later had the opportunity to go to graduate school, but circumstances kept me in photography. I loved anthropology, though. I found that it and other sciences offer the same kinds of opportunities for the expression of creativity.

You've also done some work with Don of Plain Wrap, in Lutefisk. How did you guys get together, and are there any updates to Lutefisk?

Actually I was not in Lutefisk. After I left MIA, I got involved in a blues band with Bob Gnarly of Plain Wrap, Arab of Love Canal and some other guys. Don joined later, and that's where he got the name Dallas. We never put much effort into the band, it was just a way to have some fun. But we got to do some cool shows, opening for bands like Jane's Addiction and Fishbone. We even played the Long Beach Blues Festival. We got a standing ovation but we sort of crashed the party because we were a bunch of punks posing as bluesmen. Then I played in another band with him called 3D Picnic, but I quit and went to college before I did any recording with them. Lutefisk broke up after they were dropped from their label in the big Interscope consolidation a few years ago. Dallas Don is recently married and working on new music.

Sorry, my mistake, but that sounds like it was really interesting. What was the name of that band with you, Bob, and Arab?

Arab and the Suburban Turbans. We did a killer blues version of Black Flag's "Nervous Breakdown" that almost made it on a Flipside compilation, but didn't for political reasons. Another very quick 8-track recording. Maybe we'll put some of that on the MIA site as well.

All Things Mundane Will Be Destroyed:

MILEMARKER



Photos by Eileen Maxson and David Ensminger

Who thought that the force of nature would allow a band like Milemarker to catch steam and rumble through our consciousness? Take one magazine maker, one prose prodigy, and one post-feminist puppeteer punk and you get the manic and magnificent performance that recalls both Ultravox and Fugazi, Gang of Four and the Birthday Party, and Kerosene 454 and Portishead. If you want razor-clean honesty, blitzkrieg idealism, and also want to shake your bottom end to a schizo beat, plus feel some "gimme danger" vibes, then sell your car, buy a beat up bike, forgo all bullshit and trends, and listen to the true heartache symphony of Milemarker.

Is the idea of a young person picking up a guitar or organ, joining a band, and hitting the road actually one of the most reactionary things a person can do, since it is reactive and not proactive, where instead of producing solutions you're really just entertaining people and simply talking about it?

Roby: But what about the happiness of an individual? What part does that play? Like a lot of people are working really hard, but not paying attention to what's going on, but they're not happy any how. What if playing in a band makes someone feel happy? Leading a happy life is pretty impressive in this day and age.

Dave: Reactionary in what sense? Like a reaction against what?

Reactionary in the sense that instead of going to a shelter and helping out in the soup line, a kid hits the road and tells people they should help out in the soup line.

Al: Well, our bands talks about politics, but I think concretely speaking the only thing our band can offer is that it is vehicle of personal



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as long as I am standing in front of some people, I might as well try to get something across about how I would like the world to be.

liberation for the people that are making it, and hopefully it is giving people ideas or making people feel good, but I don't think our band is revolutionary, and I don't think bands generally can be.

Dave: It's definitely not like buying a Milemarker or going to a Milemarker show is actually a substitute for doing something in your community.

Roby: I think he's talking about production, he's talking about us, not the audience.

Al: Basically, being in a band is not equivalent to working in a homeless shelter or going to a political demonstration. Being in a band is self-serving. I play in a band because I like it. It's fun, not because I'm changing the world. But as long as I am standing in front of some people, I might as well try to get something across about how I would like the world to be.

At one recent show, the show stopped for a brief moment, and one of you put a mic in front of someone and asked, what is more important than the idea of 6,000 Afghans dying in war? Is that a political act, or just having fun?

Al: I can imagine that there have been times when we have talked about, especially when the war in Afghanistan was really going, like we were speaking out against it at shows, and people would react negatively, or heckle us at shows. I can remember times when we would handle that situation by being like, ok, what do you have to say about it? Usually you see that they are just heckling the fact that someone is talking.

Dave: Actually, where did you read that?

It was a web-site review of a show you did.

Dave: Actually, I remember that show. I think I said that when someone was saying, "shut up and rock" when Al was saying something about the war. It kind of got to be like, that's not important, just play some rock, and I was ok, come up and tell me what you think. What more important is going on in the world? Rock music, I don't think so.

Al: That person was really making the point that you are making, basically saying you are not here to inform us, you are here to entertain us, which is true.

You did some shows with the International Noise Conspiracy, who mentioned they had to soft-pedal around the issue a bit, because they are not Americans and it was so close to Sept. 11th, so they didn't want to approach the issue outright, but inform the audience that it was a concern, and that the audience should think about the war too. How would you compare yourself to them, not musically, but ideologically?

Roby: It's different because they present themselves as a pretty strict situationalist band. I think that we don't all have radically different political views, but somewhat different political views, so it's difficult to come up with a strict party line for our band. It's a little bit different.

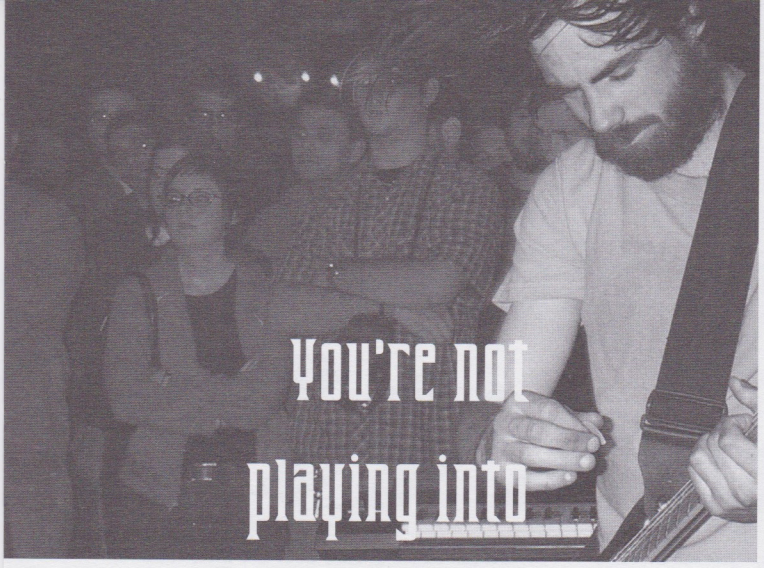
Dave: It feels like for them their schtick is politics. Our band sometimes will talk about politics, but sometimes will not. Maybe I will be carrying around a zine like I just gave you (*Media Reader*) or any number of other zines, or have a table from AK Press, so the politics are more varied. There's no direct like, you do this for your life to be happy, because Roby's idea of being happy isn't necessarily mine. It's more like intertwined. We're much more the type of band that encourages people to talk to us afterwards and be interested in something we are doing or something we say rather than getting up and delivering a straightforward message like, stop buying things! Because there's a reason behind all your slogans.

You were in Europe when the war in Afghanistan started? I was in Budapest when the bombs started falling.

Dave: Yeah, we were in Europe during that time too.

I remember walking the streets and seeing a punk show and I thought people would press me about the issue and ask me things, but only one person really did. Hungarians seemed a bit indifferent to it all. What vibe did you get?

Roby: It varied pretty greatly. I think we talked about it almost every night, because we didn't want to be perceived as American cowboys, like yes, we're bombing and destroying the people who came to get us. So



You're not playing into any actual subcultural politics that go on here, just totally tying into the aesthetics of rebellion, which some people are into...

it was important for us to be like, we're against the war. It was pretty simple, like we're not into it. We're against any action that our country may take, even before the bombing started. So the people tended to talk because we were saying something about it. Some people were like, yeah, that's awesome, and other people were like, yeah, your country totally stinks. It varied greatly because we were saying something about it every night and someone would approach us about it.

Al: I think that also when you think about going to another country one thing you realize is that you get to Europe and the Sept. 11th events are an event that happened in another country. People definitely talked to us about it because as a news issue, we're Americans, so they asked how we felt about it. But I was sort of struck by the extent by which...Well, in the U.S. it is so emotional and tied up with so many things, so you have to think about what you say. There it was just...People could be much more up front, people could be like, yeah, the U.S. deserved it, right off the bat, if they felt that way. It was interesting when I think about what is happening in Israel, for instance, and how it affects me.

You've said that the band's level of irony and detachment works well in Europe, so are you saying it doesn't work well in America?

Al: No, the quote was that actually it doesn't work as well in Europe, and the reason being...Well, what I was referring to specifically was the cover of the *Frigid Forms Sell* record. To me, it has obvious ironic content, but putting it in another context changes it. For instance, we went to Japan too, and that was pretty interesting, because in the Japanese context it just looked like everything else looks there. It wasn't exaggerated.

Dave: And the word frigid doesn't translate well. It meant something like, well, some convoluted form of sexual, but in a weird way. They couldn't translate it so well for me. It didn't mean, well, it wasn't an opposition to what we were actually doing.

It was kind of lost?

Dave: It was completely lost (*everyone laughs*).

Al: It was like you could tell there were people who came to the shows because there was a pretty girl on the cover.

Roby: People even said that to me.

Al: But as a compliment. And what can you say to that, because the language barrier is too great to explain.

You wouldn't try to explain that you were mocking a Gap ad or teasing with marketing schemes?

Al: You just didn't get it across to them. In Europe, it's harder to communicate, but Japan was a whole other level.

Dave: It didn't work.

Roby: The politics of Europe, well, the people are so serious and hard-lined they were like, that's all you are going to give us?

That's disappointing, they thought?

Roby: More like, that's fine and all, but really, come on. But in Japan there was no way to explain it at all because it is intrinsic in their culture, and there isn't an opposition culture the same way there is in Europe or the United States.

Al: You're not playing into any actual subcultural politics that go on here, just totally tying into the aesthetics of rebellion, which some people are into...

It's not unlike the International Noise Conspiracy talking about how their post-modern critique sort of fell flat when they toured China. People would applaud when they did leg kicks, like they were seeing Chuck Berry. The language barrier was intense.

Al: It's kind of interesting because another reason maybe why it didn't work is because it shows the limitations of the argument too, because you go to China, and how is a rock band going to critique capitalism in China? A rock band is the epitome of capitalism in China, and there is no way to be anything but that.

Al had said that the U.S. is really a Prozac-infested, homogenized culture. Does that really define culture as a whole, or just white middle-class culture?

Al: Um...

Roby: I can't speak for Al, I believe it refers to white culture for sure. White middle-class culture.

We shouldn't consider that as a critique of America as a whole?

Noah: I think that Prozac being the white middle-class culture, but everybody's got their thing, you know? I don't want to make generalizations, but every group of people's got a thing they do to numb themselves, whether it's upper-class people drinking Crown Royal or people smoking crack on the street, or some people take Prozac. Whatever it is, people are numbing themselves in order to deal...

It might vary, but it still happens.

Noah: It's happening all the way through. I don't want to cut Al off.

One of you also stated that opening new markets for Troubleman Records in Iowa is pretty the same as opening new markets for gasoline in China?

Roby: Who said that?

Al: I said it.

So are you saying that opening a market for Jade Tree (your label) in Texas is the same as opening up a market for gas in China? Or they equally evil, or lesser/greater in terms of degrees?

Al: The point I was trying to make, I guess, was what you were talking earlier about revolutionary vs. reactionary and being in a band. The point was that one of the failures of punk rock as a political subculture is seen a lot times in the means of dissemination and reproduction. Even a totally DIY record label is still mirroring capitalist production even on the microcosmic level. I mean a culture that is based around making things and distributing them is going to be about money, because we live in a money economy. I don't have a solution for that because it makes it inherently kind of difficult to...Well, it limits the criticisms you can make.

But you can you make conscious decisions to do things differently? Because you've said that the band doesn't want to play regular rock type clubs, so is that a way of providing a real concrete alternative?

Noah: Dave and I were talking about this last night. Sure there's a box onto which mainstream bands tend to operate and then just by us being in a van, playing shows, and selling records, we're kind of the same thing they are doing, but hopefully we can conduct ourselves in a way outside of that box, by not having the tour bus, and being more human, like the people who come to our shows, or like not pretending to be anything special.

Roby: I think it's super important to be supporting the things that are like operated by people we know who are doing it on a smaller level, like people trying to do their own thing, like not rock clubs, but art spaces. Like any other alternative, well I don't know what to call it, like alternative spaces, so hopefully eventually they can build the infrastructure and own the spaces and can keep them open. Small spaces go under every day, and it's totally tragic. Until we can support each other in order to buy these spaces and set up something permanent, we're constantly going to be renting and getting kicked out forever, and that's the biggest tragedy right now. We can't quite get it together to own our spaces.

Dave: There are a lot of alternative spaces that are set up really well, like as pro as the big rock clubs and run by people that are cool. Then there are spaces that are set up and run really shitty, where people have no idea what they're doing. And the same with record labels, and I think that's too bad, because people are setting up spaces like that, and bands will play them but only get five dollars at the end of the night because the guy who did the show ran off with the money and bought cocaine with it. They're like, I'm sorry, it's the first time this has ever happened. The next time that band comes through they don't want to play that space. People that are super-responsible and pulling things off better than any club possibly could, like the Hard Back Café in Gainesville, FL before it shut down was the perfect example of a place that was run by awesome people and was great to bands. Those are the places that I think are important to support.

Al: I think one mistake a lot of bands make is that they sort of see these other avenues. Anybody who plays in a band wants to reach people or expand their audience or whatever. And there are easy ways to do it, like play a bigger show, try to get the interview in the glossier and glossier magazine or whatever, and as a band gets bigger they don't try to have a show at the cool local alternative space.

Dave: They'd rather play the rock club and make 3,000 grand and play to forty people. Then they realize they made a gigantic mistake, they saw the man and they were like, killer.

Al: Instead of playing the medium show in a room that holds fifty people, but next time you come through and play to 100 people in a room that can hold 200 people.

Roby: That doesn't help the spaces, it doesn't give back. What helps the infrastructure keep going is giving back. Throw down your money where it matters instead of trying to climb some ladder.

Dave: The coolest thing was in Denmark when we played a show, and not many people came, maybe 50 people were there, and they had this small room downstairs from this giant rock club, but it was kind of a post squat kind of place, like it was a legal squat now. They gave us way too much money, not like too much, they wanted to give it to us. We didn't have a guarantee of anything. They just said, here's the money, say, 500 bucks. We were like, 500 bucks? That much money didn't come in the door. It's never the intention of this band to take more money than we earned, more than what comes in. They were like no, the only thing is, keep coming back, and eventually we'll start making money off you in a few years. It's like, Fugazi still plays here because we do a good job with their shows. It's that type of recycling that keeps places alive and lets smaller bands actually tour and actually be able to pay for their band rental.

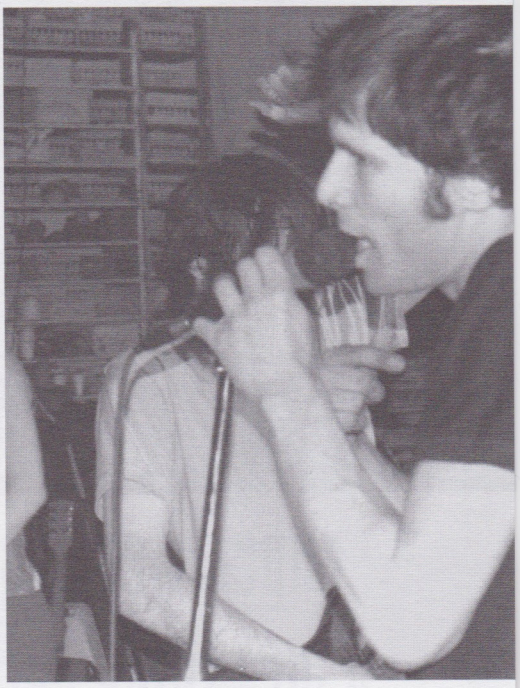
Al: One thing that I am happy about right now is that I feel like if we have friends who are in a band, I feel that people will come to see us and we can help people out. That's the kind of thing you have to keep in mind. That's how you want people to treat you, so you should treat them that way.

Al, you've said, I don't like work, I'm totally not into it. But being on the road for months at a time is a hell of a lot of work. Are you just talking about working for somebody or just work in general?

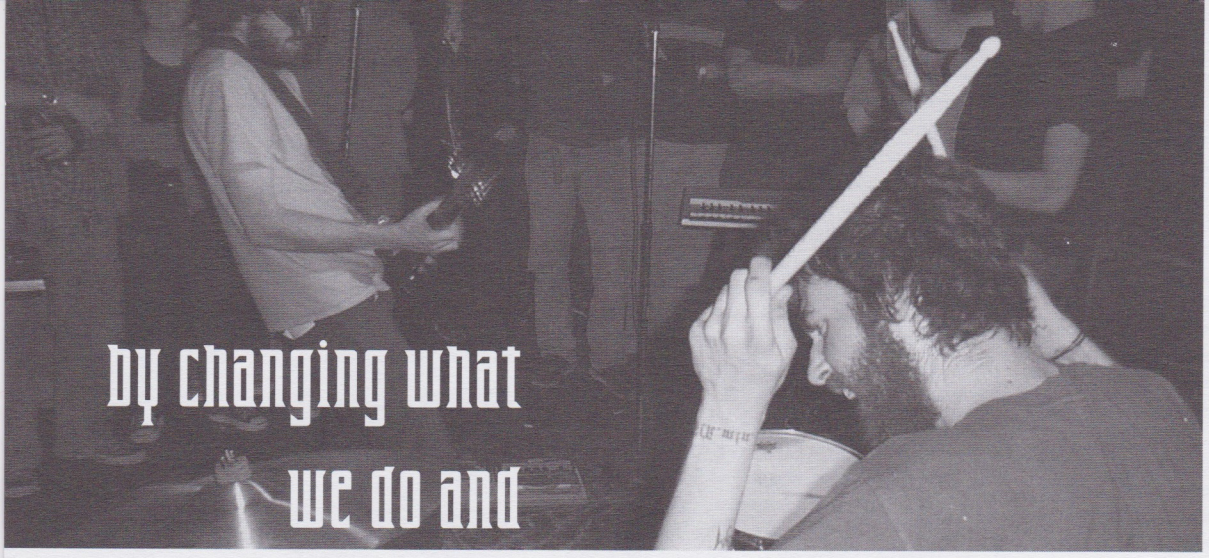
Roby: I would like to know the answer to this question.

Al: Well, at the time that I said that quote I meant working for other people, but since then I have devolved further and I just don't like working at all. Now I am officially just a totally lazy person. (*Everyone laughs*)

Dave, you've said that every show you play costs 40 hours of people's lives, so if I



Even a totally DIY record label is still mirroring capitalist production even on the microcosmic level.





by changing what we do and experimenting a lot I think our hopes is that you come to see us because we're the band you go to see because you don't know what they are going to do

spend 10 dollars on a CD, that's more than an hour's work, so I should get ten times that amount return on it. Am I thinking too much about the equation, or is important for a band to remember that every show and CD a person buys is a lot of his/her time and money?

Al: Like we should charge twice as much for this record because we expect the listener to have twice as much in return because it's really good.

Roby: The show is an easier one, because a record once it's done, it's done. But with shows you have to try and work as hard as you can to make it decent. I think we are very conscious of that, like making sure that we perform well or at least make the show exciting because it stinks that you worked for an hour and get forty minutes of music in return when it's not good.

Al: The question of it being work to be on tour is interesting. I don't like to go see bands that are boring, so one of the things that makes it worthwhile is asking yourself, would I be happy if I saw my band? I think we all try and be a band that people would like to see.

But you don't set people on fire anymore. Were the laser shows or synchronized video shows becoming too gimmicky or hollow?

Dave: Expected, more than anything.

But for ten bucks some kids want to see the laser show they've heard about, or someone set on fire.

Dave: Yeah, but you know, get new expectations. When I go see a band…

But some kid from a small town that has never seen you before might come with those expectations because he's read reviews in on-line magazines…But if you roll through the set just like any other band, might that not be disappointing?

Al: Like where's the light show?

Roby: Exactly, where's the fire?

I worked an hour for that.

Al: I guess that by changing what we do and experimenting a lot I think our hope is that you come to see us because we're the band you go to see because you don't know what they are going to do, like I guess have our cake and eat it too.

Roby: I agree, because I can understand the kid who lives in Sioux City who wanted to see the fire and didn't get it, but that's` too bad, and hopefully they got something else.

Al: Hopefully we're talented enough that people won't even think about the fire.

Some of Al's early favorite punk records were Suicidal Tendencies, BGK, Husker Du…But now you're listening to early Duran Duran, Cave-In, and Trans-Am.

Roby: *(teasingly)*You like Cave-In?!

Al: I wrote down the last three records I had bought.

In my own mind, however, when I listen to Milemarker records I hear everything from Ultravox to Kerosene 454, and some people may think I am full of shit, but is there a link between Husker Du and Duran Duran, say in the melodies?

Dave: Those aren't my bands *(laughs)*.

Roby: Musically, a link?

Well, when you're 18, you like MDC, and when your 30, you're not supposed to like them any more…

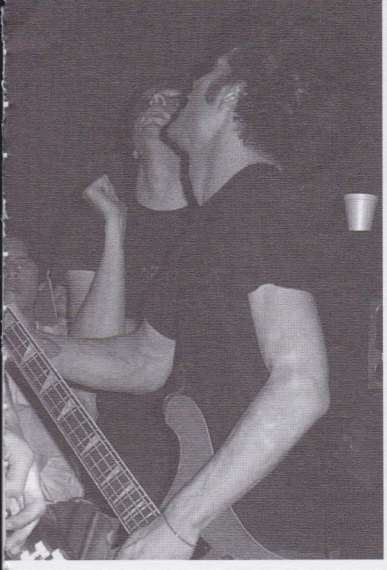
Roby: But as get older you start expanding and get access to all these bands that when you were young…

Like listening to Ella Fitzgerald back-to-back with MDC?

Roby: I think that's wonderful. That's the thing about getting older, you don't have the same hang-ups you did as a kid, like I'm not going to listen to that, that's not cool. I listen to everything now.

Al: That was my one big mistake when I was a kid, first I liked metal, then I got into punk, and I was like, I like punk now, I have to get rid of these records because I can't like metal now. The thing is now I get it all.

Whose mom described Milemarker as a





blues band and then your aunt came out to a show and said, so this is what they call the blues these days?
Al: Mine.

Was she just associating it with something rather raw and emotional?
Roby: Can I just quote Journey? *(laughs)*. "Some will win, some will lose, some were born to sing the blues." It's all the same man.
Al: If Journey could say that, we can say that.

"One of our primary strengths is our ability to constantly reinvent ourselves," you've said. Is there a point where you can't re-invent, and that's quitting time?
Dave: Maybe one day we will put out a slow jam computer record.
Al: I will be really psyched about that. (*Everyone laughs*). I hope this band will end when we have reached our destination on our creative journey, but most likely we will just end up driving off a cliff, dying in a car wreck, or getting in some terribly violent extended argument and never speaking to one and another again.

"Being in a band can be an education in inter-personal relationships, economics, ethics, musicianship…"
Roby: Wow. (*Everyone laughs*)
Dave: That sounds like the whole high school curriculum.

That's the whole liberal arts education right there. I always told people that listening to music was at least half my education, that indeed if you want to know about things, you can listen to music or be in a band, and not necessarily be at school and absorbing great thinkers.
Dave: I disagree with that, because I think that a lot of the bands that sing about economics and politics are full of shit, more or less.
Roby: Not necessarily.
Dave: I am not saying all bands by any means.
Al: Well, I said it, and what I was saying is that being in a band teaches you those things.
Dave: I think it's hard to see a bunch of middle-class white kids come out and burn the flag and say smash capitalism, and they drive off in a SUV.
Roby: But some other kid may see that and say, wow, I never thought about that. I thought capitalism was the only way, survival of the fittest and closest to natural law. Maybe that kid will begin to question what he/she was brought up with.
Dave: I would recommend reading…

Don't say *Das Kapital*!
Dave: No, what I am saying is that I recommend reading any political theory, whether it be Marx, Chomsky, or whoever. Even maybe not even political economic theory, but read a logic book or something, before I'd say go that show. But definitely.

Music can't replace that knowledge or experience?
Dave: It can. But I think you need both. You need one to understand why one isn't as valid maybe as it should be, or as initially you thought it was.
Roby: I think music is a great catalyst for that.

To get you to the books?
Roby: Yeah, to get you to the books. Or to get you to question beyond what you were taught, because of course every kid sees a band and is like all psyched because it's exciting. A band is going to be much more impressive to a kid than a teacher is I think.

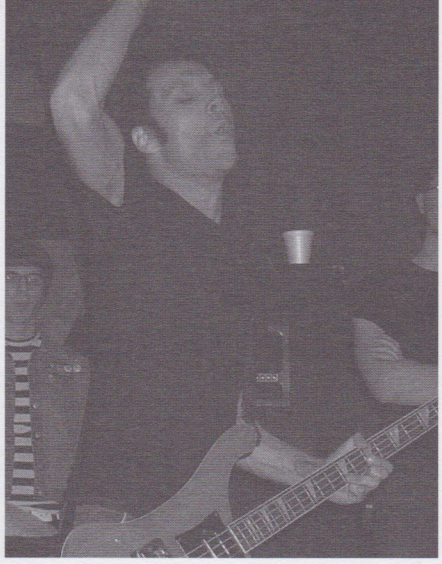
Or maybe more impressive than Noam Chomsky, who is very monotone.
Dave: And the stuff that he writes is really hard to read. Me and Tim were talking about a week or two ago about the idea of setting up your own tour, and having the initiative to go around and call people and take the months and months of planning that it takes, to be able to get a vehicle and actually go out and be able to do something on your own. You create your own sort of economy of budgeting people, like you get a dollar a day, don't eat over, that type of thing, which I think is a very valuable lesson to people.

But I believe it was you who said that you like to take manifestos and work them to their absurd conclusions. So whether you're presented with dadaism or situationalism, if you take these "programs" all the way, do you see that they are non-practical? Like if we read Marx will it really lead us to an utopia or something like the Soviet Union every time?
Dave: No, I don't think it would lead us to something like the Soviet Union every time. I also think that it's pretty outdated at this point, in the world we're living in. The advanced capitalist structure is much different than when he wrote.

But if that's true, every manifesto is going to be dated within a certain frame of time.
Al: Mmm, but I think there's still a lot. Knowledge of Marxism and a Marxist take on economics is still very valuable right now. You have to apply it to the current situation but to dismiss that as just another manifesto is like, uh…

Like dismissing the Bible as just another book?
Roby: Wow. In the sense, well, for me, in the sense that to…Well, I dunno. I think that a lot of what Marx said about economics and the course of history and political history is correct, so telling me that it's just another manifesto is like telling Muslims that the Koran is just another book, or doing the same with Christians and the Bible, and what's the point of doing that when people are killing each other based on those books? What's the point of saying the Bible is another book? It isn't. Thousands and thousands of people base their lives on it and make decisions based on it.

Who's been a bigger threat to the music industry, Fugazi or Prince?
Al: Probably Prince.
Noah: Yeah, because Fugazi doesn't operate within those constraints.
Dave: They were never in it, and Prince fucked with it, and Fugazi was just not going to do it.
Al: I think that the phenomenon of Fugazi as a band is one of the greatest things that ever happened.
Noah: It raised the bar for us all.
Al: Yeah, there are so many things about the



I hope this band will end when we have reached our destination on our creative journey, but most likely we will just end up driving off a cliff.

band that I think are so awesome, but on the other hand, you can't...Well, you can follow Fugazi's example, which is the right thing to do, but you will not become Fugazi. Whereas Prince is pretty much in the standard pattern of playing the industry game, and in some ways trying to attack it, where Fugazi is just being Fugazi.

You've said that the whole challenge of being in a rock band these days is how not to make it seem like a TV show. So if you're trying to not make it like a TV show, what are you trying to make it like?
Dave: Like something that's actually happening to you.

So if we saw old clips of the Who on TV, that wasn't really happening?
Dave: It's not happening to you if you're watching it on TV.

But for the people who were exposed via TV?
Al: The thing is that enough people have seen clips of bands playing that I have the feeling that their reactions are no different to a taped band playing, like they don't seem to be having any more of a visceral reaction.
Dave: It's like what you (Noah) was saying when we went into LA and saw the Hollywood sign. It doesn't register any more as being there because you've seen it so many times on TV that it's not real to me. It's art in the age of mechanical reproduction.
Noah: It's like people can sit down and watch a band because it's like sitting down on your couch and watching television. You don't have to participate in it at all, but if you are going to see a live band, hopefully it's something more, like there's more going on either in front of you or around you than just these people dancing around, like people dance around and have all these fake situations on television. Hopefully you can participate in what's going on, and be moved to do something more than just stand there. Especially this band every night tries to talk to the audience to get them to participate, to get them to at least talk or let us know what they're feeling, because we're letting them know what we're feeling, and people just stand there, like, are they talking to me?
Dave: It's up in the air. If you want to be a band that plays a song, lights a cigarette, drinks a beer, and chills out for a minute, then you're a background band, and I don't think that anybody in this band is interested in being entertainment.

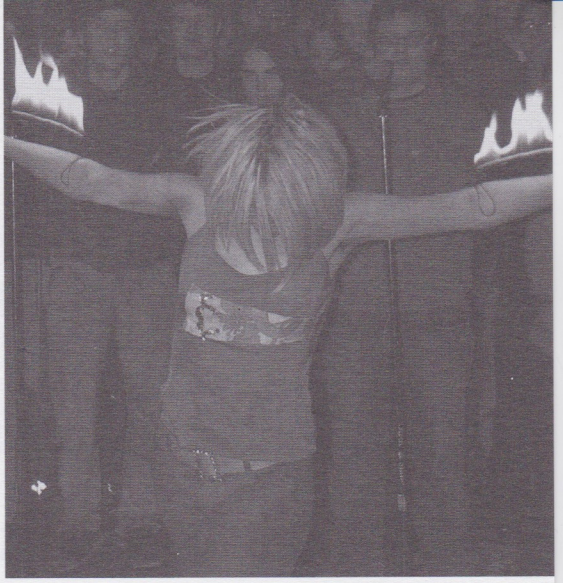
But who are bands beyond Fugazi that have made a cultural impact and transcended being mere performers, like James Brown, Nina Simone, who were entertainment, but did have contact with the audience?
Noah: But did those bands between their songs actually say hey, what's going on, what are you guys pissed off about? This is what's bothering us, why are you here?
Al: I think the whole idea of cultural transcendence is maybe the wrong one because it's not, because I don't think...Well, in a broad sense James Brown did do that, but I've had that experience many times in a basement with a local North Carolina band that no one's ever heard of when I was in high school. Well, the first time I ever went to a show at someone's house, it was in a guy's living room and the paintings were like rocking...

The couch is slowly moving.
Al: The first time when I was fourteen years old and was in a slam dance pit watching a band play, it was like seeing polka dotted buffalo walking by. The whole idea of seeing this had never occurred to me.
Noah: And there's no way that that can be construed as like, I am watching this on television. All of a sudden you're in a sweaty room and there's sweaty bodies all over you, and your gyrating to that one beat, and that beat may be the snare drum that someone else is producing for you, but everybody's involved in the same thing. That's not TV, because you can't connect like that on TV.
Roby: I think it's a question of vitality in a lot of ways. It's like Patti Smith. It's like you have to give it up, and hope that people are going to feel it to.

If I am right, in the late 1970s Patti Smith played Saturday Night Live. Can she replicate live what you felt in that living room?
Noah: No.
Roby: I was speaking strictly of live performance.

But you don't think that for people who saw the Who, or Patti Smith, and that was the only way they could see them, so it equalled the sweaty bodies in the living room even though it was broadcasted?
Roby: I've never had that experience from TV.
Dave: I think we are trying to do something totally different than that. To me, the argument isn't who was a great performer, who was not, because hands-down James Brown was an amazing performer, and when you go to see him or the Beatles and you have a million people screaming, it's not the same thing. That's not what I'm trying to do by playing in a band. What concerns me is





breaking down the barrier between us being on a stage and the audience being on the floor, and somehow connect them with us and be like, we are people, we are not rock stars, we are not James Brown. I don't have a costume wardrobe. I think that's great, but that's not what I'm interested in, because what I'm interested in is telling you that you can do this too. How many times have you been some place and people are like, I could never play in a band like that. I could never put out a magazine like that. Like, you're the gifted one, and I'm like, no I'm not, I'm just a person. You can do it. Just think about it and get some drive. Work it out, it didn't happen immediately, it took years for things to finally fall together, but that's what I'm interested in doing and not being a miraculous performer where people remember me being on the Jay Leno show.
Noah: James Brown would dock his band pay when they would make mistakes, so I don't know why we are talking about this guy as being someone who is awesome, like if his sax player made a mistake, he would knock him $100.00. There was some live footage, a live clip, of him throwing his sax player off of the bandstand for making a mistake. If you are talking about seeing the Who or Patti Smith on television, it's cool that those kids saw that, but I'm sure those kids had friends who were playing music and they could have gone and seen their friends play in those bands, like people from our generation, or people from a generation a little bit earlier than us. There were people like us doing this at the same time that Patti Smith was doing that. There were other boxes of music and other scenes that were going on that were more realized, and not rock star garbage.

Has re-locating to Chicago, a very different place than North Carolina, re-shaped your attitudes or music?
Roby: Of course, we moved to a gigantic, violent, seething cold city. No, I feel completely the same *(laughs)*. I can't speak for anyone else. Like I'm totally cool after being shot at. It's really great *(laughs)*. Yeah, definitely, but not in the way…Well, maybe someone else could describe it better.

Are you guys in Whicker Park?
Roby: East Humble Park.

It's was the hometown of bands like Big Black and Tortoise, and has a larger outsider art community.
Al: Well, the big difference that I always note was just going from all of us living in Chapel Hill, and Roby was the girl that did the puppet shows, and I was the guy who worked at the copy store and makes the weird magazine, to going to the place where there is a community of puppeteers and where I meet writers all the time who give me tips about places to submit things. It's a nice feeling to be in a place that big in the sense that there's more of a community because there's more like-minded people.

These are some authors and musicians you have all mentioned at one time or another: Camus. Kafka, Orwell, Salinger, John Fante, Johnny Cash, Black Sabbath, Noam Chomsky, Dostoyesky.
Al: That was a list of geniuses *(everyone laughs)*. Was that a list of people we consider our compatriots?

No, it's a compilation I've drawn from different articles, just names you have all dropped. Okay, so the question I really want to ask is: If you could be a character in one of the authors' books, who would you be?
Noah: I would be Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*.
Al: Look at his beard. He's trying to be that character.
Dave: I would be the fucking same exact character. I don't want to be the kid that gets beat up in *Catcher in the Rye*.
(Everyone starts jostling around titles like *The Stranger* and *Ode to Catalonia*)
Roby: The first thing that comes to my mind is the "Hunger Artist." It totally came to me immediately. I was like, fuck, I can't think of anything else.

Not the bug in *Metamorphosis*?
Roby: No…
Dave: *Notes from the Underground* would be pretty killer to be in.
Noah: *Down in Out in Paris and London*, George Orwell's first book. That would be pretty cool. To be like him, doing that.

Al, would you like to be John Fante?
Al: I read that book, *Ask the Dust*, and I am pretty much that dude. That book is awesome. I only read that book by him and a short collection stories. But I almost took *Ask the Dust* as a personal affront…

I can't speak for anyone else. Like I'm totally cool after being shot at. It's really great (laughs).

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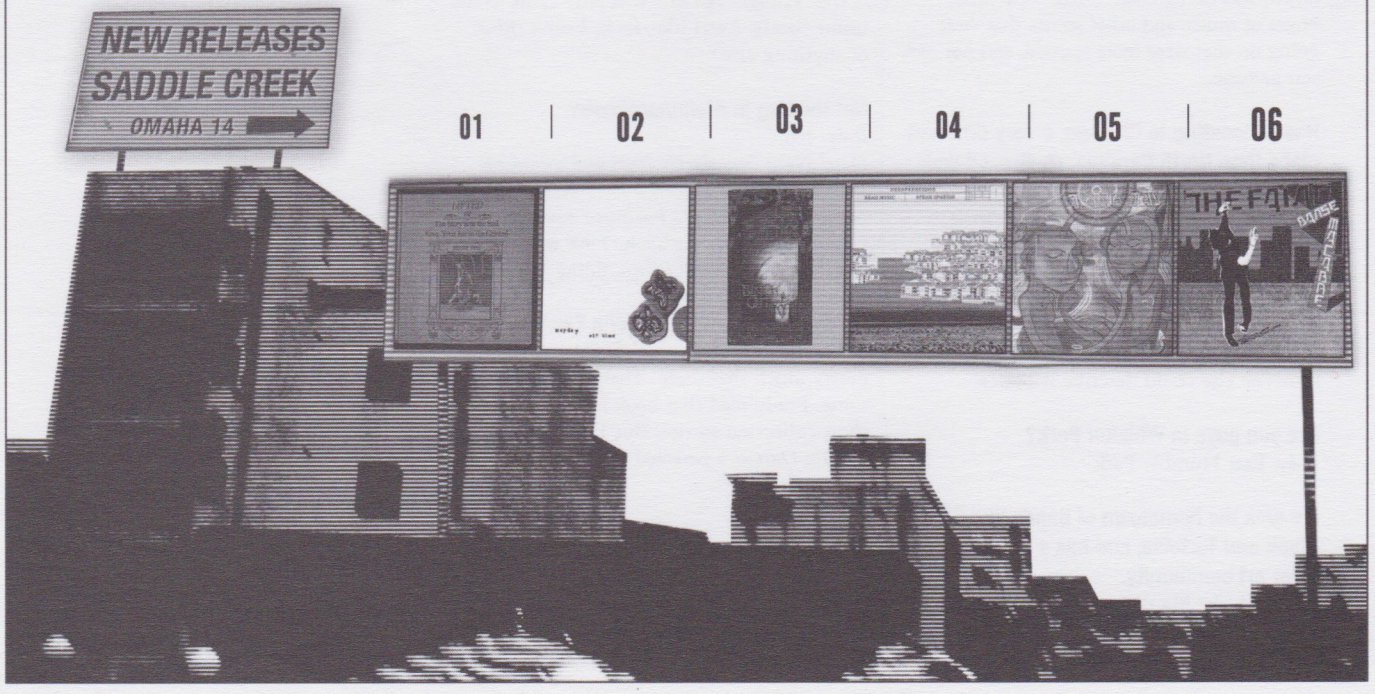
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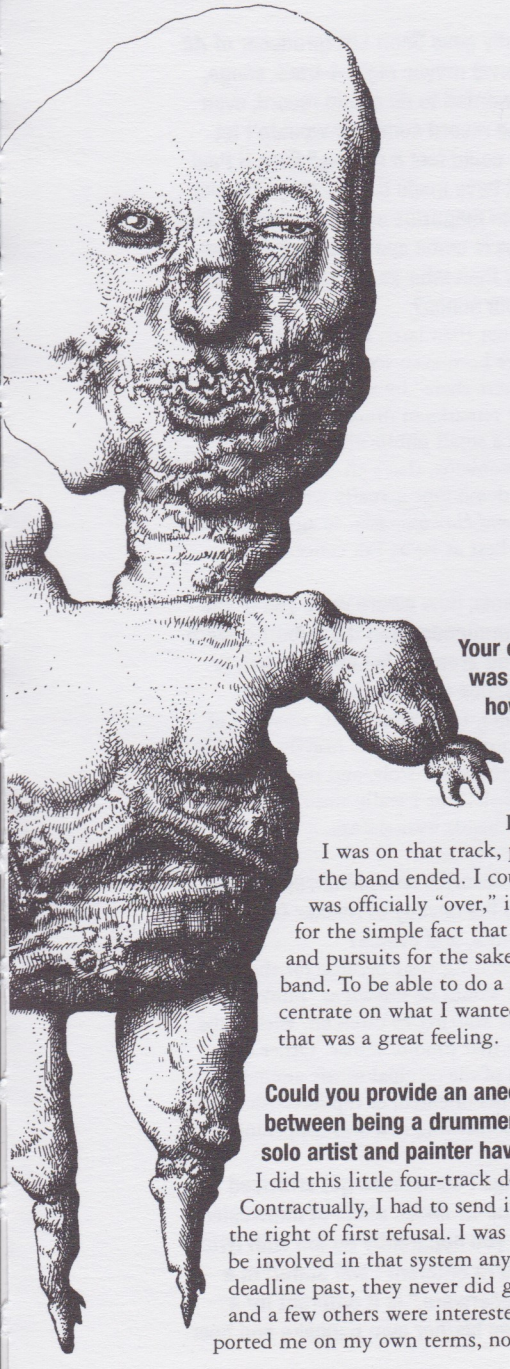
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chris mars

on painting, schizophrenia, and The Replacements



Your career with the Replacements was essentially done by age 30, so how soon did you know that you had to put those years behind you and forge ahead with painting, sculptor, and music?

I knew before the band ended that I was on that track, probably a good three years before the band ended. I could feel things ending. When it was officially "over," it was a very liberating experience for the simple fact that I had set aside my own visions and pursuits for the sake of continuing my role with the band. To be able to do a solo record, and to be able to concentrate on what I wanted to do with my art, and my life, that was a great feeling.

Could you provide an anecdote about those moments in-between being a drummer for a band and being your own solo artist and painter having shows?

I did this little four-track demo tape on a cassette recorder. Contractually, I had to send it to Warner Brothers, as they had the right of first refusal. I was terrified, because I didn't want to be involved in that system anymore. I celebrated on the day their deadline past, they never did get back to me. Meanwhile, Smash and a few others were interested. It was Smash that really supported me on my own terms, not wanting to tour and wanting to be able to pursuit my fine artwork equally. So I did the deal with them, and it was a good thing.

When *75% Less Fat* came out, you said the critics "were more interested…because it's the second record and it didn't stink." Are you saying that most critics like debut albums best, or most critics totally under-estimated you?

Neither. I'm saying that often times, it's hard to make a sophmore record to follow up a good first record. To quote Chrissy Hynde, you have a lifetime to come up with material for the first record, now you need to come out with another one a year later. So I was just happy that any attention paid to it, and that the attention was overall pretty positive.

You've said that working in the studio is like, "special effects in movies. It's time for make-believe." Was that only true after you bought your home 16 track system, or always?

I always enjoyed being in the studio for the reason that it was time to let loose, to create. I mean "make-believe" as it applies to any creative world. It's a time for invention.

Sadly, it seems like the last few Replacements albums lacked just that, make-believe, which seemed the core of *Let it Be*.

I agree. The band had lost the sense of itself at that time, among other things. Therefore, to really truly be open to that free-flowing creativity, it wasn't there anymore. Or rather, it was only there in part, in



glimpses. Unlike the time of *Let It Be*, where it was there in full.

By the mid-1990s, you had not seen or heard from any of the 'Mats, yet you had first joined Dog Breath with Bob Stinson as a junior in high school, and soon thereafter the 'Mats. How did something that took so long to develop end so abruptly?
It didn't end abruptly. It just may seem so from the outside. In fact, it took a long time to end.

Did his death actually bring the band members back into contact, or did it just highlight how far you all were removed from each other's lives?
Both.

"When Bob left. It was never the same. Slim (Dunlap) was completely opposite personality-wise." When I saw the 'Mats on the *Don't Tell A Soul* tour it was almost play by numbers, not nearly what I had heard on CBGBs bootlegs where the band would drunkenly burst into U2 songs. Did the label put pressure on you to oust Bob, was it the drinking and mayhem of his life, or was it purely for artistic reasons?
It was political in nature. The destruction of the band was imminent because of all of our collectively destructive natures at the time. Bob was just one in a series of scapegoats that proceeded and would follow him. In a nutshell, "Things are going bad. Let's fire somebody, and maybe that will fix it." Although I have to add, I was against firing Bob, and expressed this. But like many things, I wasn't calling the shots and didn't have final say. Things were never the same for me after Bob left either. You can't fuck with chemistry.

By the end, the band rarely practiced together. "We were haphazard, drunken circus with a little bit of depth, and Jack Daniels was the glue that held us together." What was the depth to you, and did the Jack Daniels truly help or hinder the depth?
The Jack Daniels helped and hindered. The problem was that by the end it was all Jack Daniels and all circus and no cohesive depth, chemistry wise. The depth was the chemistry, that we were in tune with. As I said before, we fucked with it. Ironically, Jack Daniels was something that was part of the act, but ultimately destroyed it, as did the Cocaine.

"Up until *Please to Meet Me* we still operated as a band," but what forces led you to operate differently afterwards?
I think the answer to this question is in the previous ones.

You actually gave Scott Litt (producer of *All Shook Down*) maybe eight 4-track songs, but Paul wanted to do a solo record, even though the record company wouldn't let him. "You could feel it ending." Even if Paul would not have made disparaging remarks in *Musician* magazine about your drumming, would it have come apart anyway, and better sooner than later as far as working further on your songs?
Better sooner than later, in fact, I wish it would have been even sooner, because there was "no there there" by the time it all did fall apart. The remarks in *Musician* were nothing more than a small public airing of inside political problems, that's all. All the songs from that demo tape actually wound up on *Horseshoes and Handgrenades*, so again, it was all for the best as far as I'm concerned.

As a teenager, how aware were you of the Suicide Commandos and the Suburbs. Were you loitering around J.'s Longhorn bar, or did you happen upon the scene later?
As a teenager, I was completely unaware of the local music scene. I was heavily into The Clash and the Sex Pistols, and into the idea of making music. But I really wasn't aware of what other bands were doing.

Could you describe what Minneapolis was like during the heyday of Husker Du, Replacements, and Prince?
It was an exciting time because for the first time, what would be known as "punk rock" was actually starting to catch on, with clubs supporting that kind of music. Other than that, much of the original music around town was very blues oriented, or top forty-ish bands. It felt like something new was happening.

One of things I sometimes get criticized for is my tongue-in-cheek stabs at midwestern life, which you apparently do too with lyrics like, "If you're different I will stare/I'm a fool for Tupperware." Is it different for a writer to use his/her own pancake and beer

backyard for songs instead of, well, act like my old roommates from Brooklyn who laughed at trailer park trash stereotypes in magazines and on TV, but had never seen an actual trailer?
The line is not a reflection of midwestern life specifically, it is about mainstream American lifestyles more generally. I tend to write from my own experiences or opinions, plus a touch of exaggeration. The line reflects anyone's occassional disgust with mainstream America.

When you signed to Bar/None, you wrote your own three page contract (versus the thirty page contract from Slash), got the label to buy you a $20,000 16-trach home studio, and made *Tenterhooks*, a varied and multi-genre album. But people might say your Smash records were more cohesive and better sellers (*75%*... sold 60,000 copies), and whenever you allow a musician to do whatever he/she wants, you end up with a sprawling, experimental grab bag that is hard to market. Do any of those ideas matter, or is it all about the integrity of the artistic process?
None of those ideas matter, and it is all about the artistic process. I don't believe in focus groups.

When I see your paintings, the first things that come to mind are Picasso's "Guernica," almost anything by Brueghel, the more twisted expressionistic figures of Munch and Goya, and the horribly convoluted or metamorphosed bodies of Dubuffet and Golub. So, since no art happens in a vacuum, what painters do you see when you glance at your work, and why?
I don't necessarily look for other painters in my own work, but I do look to the work of other painters in any way shape or form for inspiration, or just the pure enjoyment of viewing others' work. In a broad sense, everything in life, whether it be movies, writing, other people's artwork or just life experiences, all of that stimulus goes into a soup, then the soup gets stirred, and whatever my art is is just a ladleful of that at any particular time. There are alot of artists I could name that I like, but there's no one in particular that solely influences me, because they all influence me. I think Dali's work, in person, exposes one of the most brilliant colorists ever. I like Chagal's compositions, and also his color. I like to look at the work of Bekzinski and Ryden. I like Carrington's philosophy on what it is to be an artist, and I also like her work. I like David Lynch for his bizzarre, comedic sense. Ask another day, I'll give you a different list.

Your brother had his first pronounced schizophrenic episode at age 16, and as a result, you "acquired an early and lasting fear that if you are not one of society's 'normal' members, then you are likely to be labeled, whisked embarrassingly away from your family, stripped of your freedom, drugged, and humiliated." How did your confusion and fear manifest itself in the coming years? For instance, did you rebel against parental and school authority, and jump into rock'n'roll and punk rock, which were originally a loose-knit society of rebels, losers, outsiders, and rejects?
I think that's accurrate. I think that there was an awareness of what society was willing or unwilling to accept. I wanted both to fit in and not fit in; I wanted to fit in on my own terms. Punk rock was a great vehicle.



I like to look at the work of Bekzinski and Ryden. I like Carrington's philosophy on what it is to be an artist, and I also like her work. I like David Lynch for his bizzarre, comedic sense. Ask another day, I'll give you a different list.



I have some sensitivity to "monsters", whether they be monsters that are perceived as monsters, or real monster, like people that are actually monsters in the world; evil, cruel people, beliefs…

"I found an identity with the monsters depicted in films and books." Are we talking about everything from "Where the Wild Things Are" to the Werewolf and Frankenstein movies?
Yes. And, these would make that previous list on another day.

It seems that monsters from the 1930s classics until today always relate to fear of our bodies. The creatures are tortured souls- undead, inhuman, subhuman, or better off dead. They represent the sick and ghastly, bodies that are inverted (Dracula, with his sex parts in the upper half), assembled and animated by the wicked ambitions of men (Frankenstein), animalistic and primordial (Wolfman), or horribly invasive and disease-like things that attack from the inside out (The Thing, Alien). You work seems to acknowledge both the horror and beauty of the body, its terrifying psychology and wounded eroticism. How would you describe how your paintings relate to monsters and inner psychological depths?
I have some sensitivity to "monsters," whether they be monsters that are perceived as monsters, or real monster, like people that are actually monsters in the world; evil, cruel people, beliefs, etc. Perceived monsters are more like misfits, people who are physically deformed (or rather, uniquely formed), or people who are mentally on a different plane than the majority. I am sympathetic toward perceived monsters, because I have known and loved perceived monsters, and have felt this way myself. I am offended by Real Monsters, because of a public willingness to have this label shared between those that are "different" and those that are "evil." The word monster in its original application describes a child born with a physical defect. What does this mean that our society has taken this word to now mean "evil?" Where is that leap between appearances, either physical or emotional, and the specifically dark nature of one's soul? All this speaks of a shallowness I seek to break. My work is about looking beyond the outer to the inner, and finding the true definition of beauty - which is beyond form. I use conventional vehicles like light or composition or technique to invite the audience to my work. I use these conventional vehicles specifically to lure them into an unexpected world, where the nature of beauty or goodness is an inner expression, not a physical one. Technique is bait, I seek to reel the viewer into my world, a direct product of the outside world, where angels could be mistaken for monsters, and real monsters for heroes or kings.

"I am creating an environment to him (my brother). I rescue Bill from the oppressive institutions of the 1960s, the stereotypes of society here today." But don't you also free yourself from your own, "Fear of the system, fear of the words, the hospitals (visits), and the demons others saw?"
Yes, absolutely. It is my empathy toward my brother's condition that is a springboard to investigate my own effects from and awareness of his plight.

In its own way, "A Beautiful Mind" is also homage to schizophrenics, and a plea for understanding. Though there are vivid differences between he portrayal of the mathematician and your own paintings, do find some equal footing between your paintings and the movie?
I thought the movie was a great portrayal of the schitzophrenic condition. So I think both the movie and my work seek to shed to light on this issue, and that's what they have in common.

How exactly do you balance "the twistedness of mental illness" with the "lightheartedness of it?" Can you describe the process a bit?
Whenever you watch a loved one go through prolonged pain, or experience any sad thing more generally, humor is a natural defense mechanism. I think this is certainly an element that comes out in the work at times, since the work is, in some senses, another defense mechanism.

On a very different note, tell us about your time playing with the early version of Golden Smog.
It seemed like a fun thing at the time. When things became more serious was when I wasn't a good fit anymore, or it wasn't, for me. I was in it for the laughs and nothing more, and I got some.

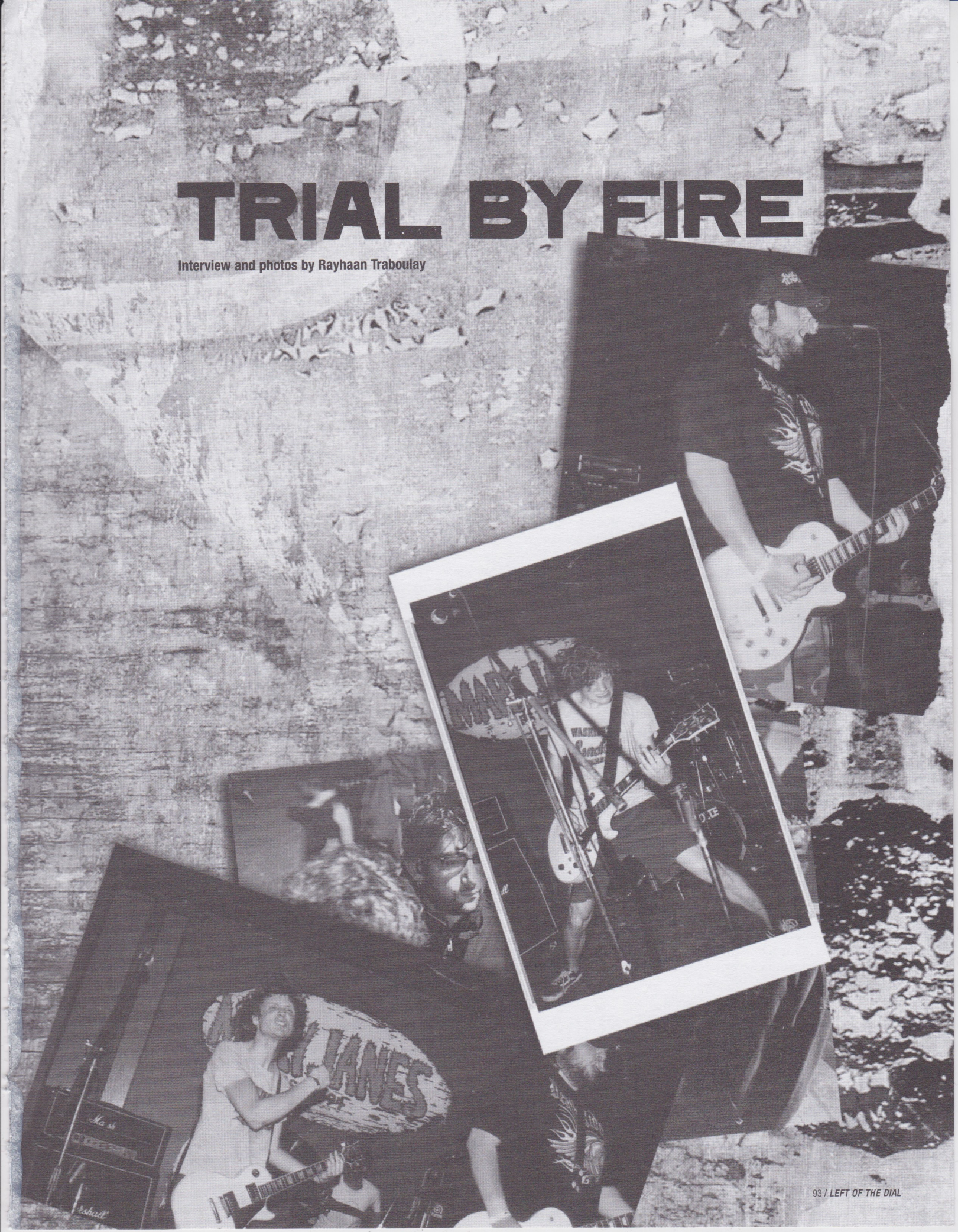
It's somewhat difficult to believe that by the time you released *75% Less Fat* and got a glowing review in *Rolling Stone* that you still couldn't stand up, play guitar, and sing at the same time. It was an interesting choice to play radio stations in Philadelphia, NY, Boston, and Minneapolis. But you just sang the material, that's it? What were those sessions like?
Very uncomfortable. I never intended to perform any of the stuff, and really only did because of severe prodding by the label to do so. Even as a musician, I'm a painter at heart. I like to work alone, invisible, patient.
I like the result being something unreal, something I can't exactly recreate outside of itself. While maybe the inability to play and stand is somewhat of an excuse, I really can't play all the instruments I do on the record at one time live. Though I've tried. But the cymbals pinch my knees, and the autoharp on my head keeps falling off.

Besides having gallery shows and making the covers for your own records, you also designed an album cover for Big Head Todd and the Monsters and brochures for the Science Museum of Minnesota. What other projects have you been doing?
I really don't accept commissions anymore. I just had a two-year long retrospective of my work come off the road. It was shown in galleries and at universities across the US and Canada. I'm presently creating a new, cohesive body of work which will debut late in 2002, all oil paintings. This show will tour galleries, universities and museums in 2003.

If the 1980s were Chris Mars, musician, the 1990s Chris Mars, painter, musician, and sculptor, what will the first decades of the new millenium be like? Chris Mars, animator, sculptor, musician, painter etc? Tell us.
I'll hang onto Chris Mars, Painter/Musician. I have a CD coming out in 2002 (check the website for details), and that new show debuting this year. I have other interests too, but we'll see. Like my best friend always says, "Put it on the list." If I could paint fifty hours a day, I would. So time will tell what other projects actually manifest.

TRIAL BY FIRE

Interview and photos by Rayhaan Traboulay



You guys recently recorded with Brian McTernan and the infamous Salad Days Studio for your first full length Ringing in the Dawn out on Jade Tree. How was that process and working with him?

Mike: Well we actually recorded our demo with him as well and we've known him for a long time , some of us longer than others and he's a great guy and has done a ton for us. We did about 10 days and the first day and a half was actually solely devoted to snare drum sound and was probably the most frustrating day and a half of my life.

Kevin: *(laughs)* Should give you some kind of idea of what kind of "Ball-Buster" Brian is.

Mike: Brian is very hard on drummers. By the end of the studio session, I was "seen and not heard" and wasn't allowed to speak.

Everyone: *(laughs)* Literally.

Mike: But after the initial snare drum problem, everything went very smoothly. We had some parts that he had suggestions for. He definitely will put in his input to say the least and a lot of it is very good. You know, we went with some of it , we didn't go with all of it and he has a lot of good ideas and helped us with our two newest songs especially, which we think turned out really well.

Jason: It was barebones but a very "give and take" situation as well and works very hard on everything he does. He gave us a lot of freedom because he knew that we took his ideas to heart when he gave us ideas.

Overall, the album has a very "down to earth" and raw feel to it without sounding like every other "live" album. Was this something that you sort of aimed for?

Jason: Totally! The recorded came out sounding like how we wanted it. We wanted it to sound professional but at the same time, really raw, edgy and have that certain "punk" vibe to it. We did want it to sound slick like a rock record.

In general, you guys are raw and emotional, especially at shows. Is that a main emphasis or focus of the whole band and do you all put in your own input or is it solely one guy that goes in there and writes the lyrics and riffs and so on?

Jason: As far as songwriting goes, we more and more from the beginning have gradually gotten to the point where we're all as equal partners as it can possibly be. I'll bring in parts or the main structure or shell of a song and once we all get in a room, everybody will give feedback and write their own part, but as far as the root of the song, I come up with it most of the time. We haven't had something that somebody else has come up with yet but I can't wait till it happens.

Mike: Jason definitely is the principle songwriter but I'd say as the band has been together for the amount of time, which has been about a year and a half to two, we've just gotten comfortable with each other in writing and a lot of people have voiced their opinions more as we've have gotten more comfortable with each other.

Jason: We're all still learning our strengths and weaknesses.

Mike: My weakness is drumming, personally.

Everyone: *(laughs)*

Jason: And I mean we're all still feeling each other out as musicians and definitely the newest two songs on the record, the ones that Brian gave us some guidance with, are definitely the ones we think are the most thought out and overall best songs.

Are you talking about the first two songs on the record?

Jason: Oh no, the very last song "Friendly Fire" and number five, "Process of Elimination" were the newest songs and the process, as far as writing goes, was the most egalitarian of all.

Mike: I'd say they are definitely two of the songs we are most proud of and the most progressive.

The song "Process of Elimination" is often perceived as a song about what happened on 9/11. Is that true or is that solely up to a listener's interpretation of the lyrics?

Jason: No. The lyrics were written part before and part post. It's more about the history of the United States government, whether it be overt or covert sponsored terrorism throughout the world and I think post 9/11, people will hear it in a different way.

Kevin: Because people are looking for those meanings at this time.

Jason: But also, since the United States was finally a target of something like that, especially to that scale, people will automatically assume the song was about that. The only thing different between the atrocity that happened on 9/11 and atrocities that we, as in our government, have perpetrated across the world is the target. You know, it's finally come home and it's awful and we are saying how awful it is. Hopefully this will lead to more people really looking in and asking themselves "Why are these people so mad and why do they have such a hatred towards America" and so forth.

As far as the name Trial By Fire goes, is there any definite significance or meaning ?

Kevin: Ha ha, no, but actually, the way we have been doing things pretty much is, well, actually, the way the band has come about has sort of been the definition of that.

Jason: Things have sort of been backwards in the way the band has come about and off the strength of our demo we had label interest and this band hadn't even played a show yet. And so, we started playing shows knowing that we had some label interest, but we played shows for a good five to six months before we put pen to paper and signed to Jade Tree. It's been excellent so far. Signing with Jade Tree and having so few people knowing about us and us doing something on this scale and the scale of the tour we did with Hot Water Music is fantastic. We're sort of learning in front of everybody and sort of stretching our legs and becoming a band in front of everybody. So everything we do is sort of a "Trial By Fire" in a way. We're learning as we go along and we are sort of throwing stuff against the wall and if it works it works.

What about your "three arrows" logo, any symbolism behind that at all?

Kevin: The Strike Anywhere logo?

Nah, the one inside the CD Booklet.

Kevin: No, actually there is no significance in that. In fact, we have talked about actually taking that out. That was mainly the guy who designed the layout concept idea.

Jason: It was part of Michael's (designer of layout) imagery that he got as he listened to the CD. It really had nothing to do with us.

Would you say being from D.C. it's harder to get any recognition since bands are more abundant there?

Kevin: No, not at all. If anything, it's the other way around.

Mike: Things are a lot better in D.C. and there are a lot more bands than say your average rural town, but on the other hand there are a lot more shows happening.

Kevin: I think doing a tour in the Midwest really, really drives home how lucky we are to be where we're from. I can't even put it into words. To go to places where there are like 15 kids who won't even stand up during bands and then to go home and there will be local shows with all local bands and there will be like 400 kids there. I mean there's all different types of amazing bands from our area; Indeed, Darkest Hour, Striking Distance... And the kids are amazingly supportive and

...some of the places that we have played on this tour were not a mainstay staple of youth culture. And that is the positive thing that [we] are trying to do so that maybe kids will see that and say "Oh look, there's other kids playing music"

We want to make good records and I like to write about things I care about and since I'm a news hound and am big into, I shouldn't say politics but rather, current events, they will always have to do with that. That's just who I am , how I write, and it's reflected in what we do.



come out to all the shows.
Jason: And it's definitely not knocking the Midwest,
Everyone: No, not at all.
Jason: It's just that some of the places that we have played on this tour were not a mainstay staple of youth culture. And that is the positive thing that bands like us and Strike Anywhere are trying to do so that maybe kids will see that and say "Oh look, there's other kids playing music" and that might encourage them to do the same. They are "budding" scenes out there, so hopefully with time it will grow.

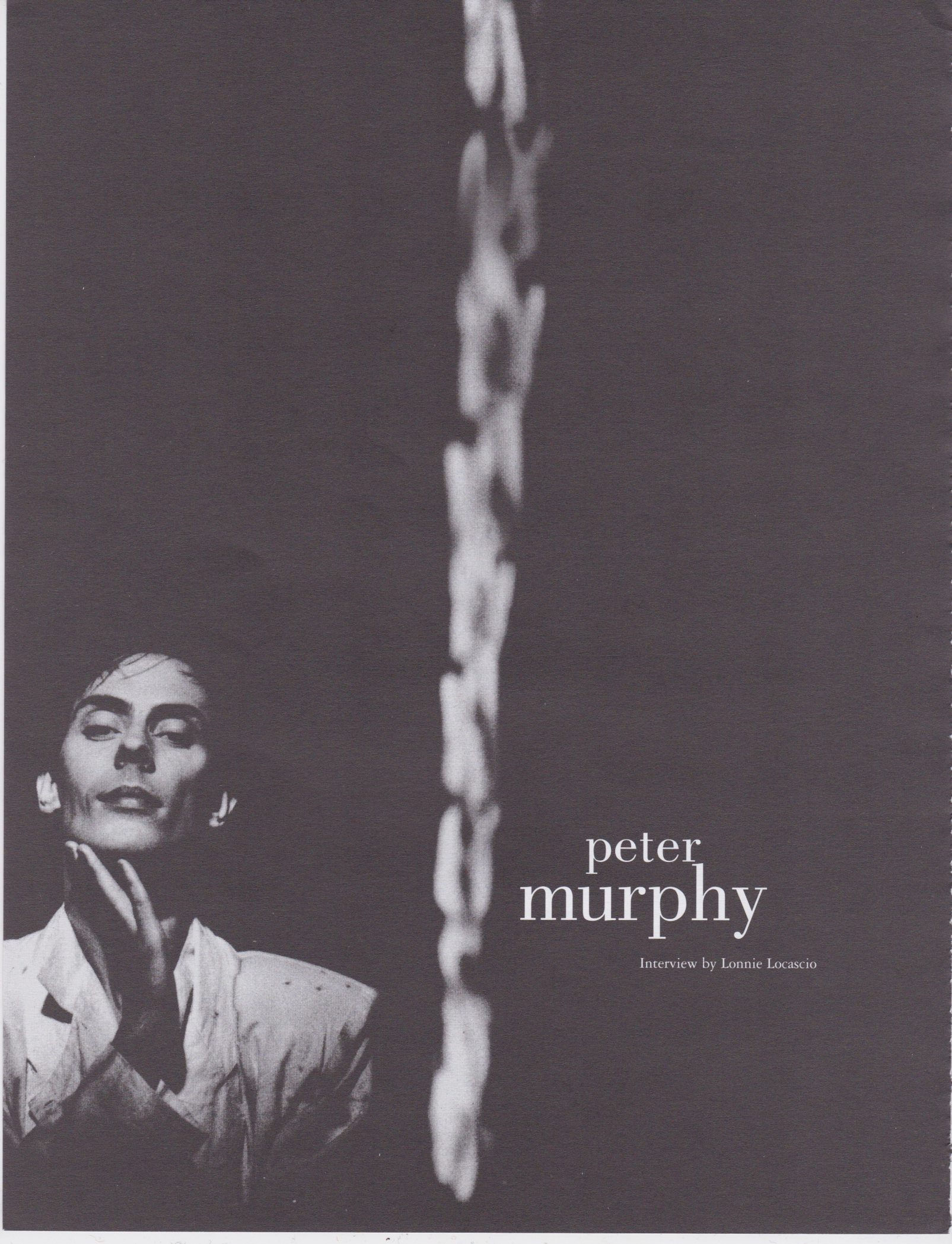
As far as the tension/standstill between the punks and straight edge kids and the youth crew/hardcore kids vs. the metal kids , how true does that still stand or is that just speculation and rumors?
Mike: That was more mid '90s and since then it is pretty much dead now.
Kevin: I can't remember the last time I even saw a fight in D.C. Every now and then you'll have some stupid random fight,but it won't even last very long.
Jason: As far as now I can remember I have not really seen any fights in years. It's pretty peaceful.
Kevin: Not even a pushing match or whatever.
Jason: And then it's like "What the hell are you doing?" and it is pretty much self-governed and self-policed. And the good thing is that there hasn't had to be much self-policing. The scene is, however, segmented into genres and fashion and the sort of thing like that, which is a little upsetting but understandable.
Mike: You'll get shows that are varied a lot and eclectic and those are some of the best ones.
Jason: The shows in D.C. that have a very diverse sound amongst the bands, those are my favorite shows and there are a lot more and more of those happening as bands like us who have a more hardcore sound try to reach out to different audiences and play with different style bands say, "Hey Q and not U, we'd love to play a show with you!"
Mike: Yeah, the last Wilson Center show was insane, it was great.
Jason: The Wilson Center was a legendary venue in D.C. and helped nurture a lot of the bands and the punk scene in the 1980s and last fall it had its last show and on that bill you had bands playing like Pg. 99, Q and Not U, us, Strike Anywhere, Kill the Man Who Questions, Del Cielo, and the vibe at that show was one of the best vibes I had ever had at a show before.
Mike: There were 900 kids there.
Kevin: 900 kids plus…
Mike: It was a fire hazard, but it was a lot of fun.

What were some of the other cities where you guys had good responses in?
Jason: Gillman St. in Frisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis.
Mike: Pensacola on the Hot Water tour.
Kevin: Philadelphia.
Collin: Rochester, New York was fantastic.
Mike: Jersey, Baltimore, Irvine.
Jason: I have not, crowd response wise, had a bad experience. Whether or not we're personally happy with the way we play, that's another story.
Everyone: (*laughs*)
Jason: I can't complain, we always are trying to play for new people and it is very rare that the first time you play for a group of people that there is going to be some sort of explosive reaction like people diving off the stage when they have never heard your music before. I mean the third or fourth time we go through these towns will be the telling.

A lot of people compare you guys to Avail, do you think this is a fair comparison?
Jason: I think maybe sound-wise, the sound that comes through Richmond, the sound that we have and the sound that say Kid Dynamite had in Philadelphia is kind of regional and I think it has a lot to do with influence more than anything. I mean Avail started in Reston, Virginia which is right outside of D.C. and they didn't originally come out of Richmond, they moved there later. And I think they were influenced by the same bands we were influenced by like Minor Threat, Bad Brains, Dag Nasty, Embrace.
Kevin: I think a lot of people make that association with Avail primarily because of Jason's voice. I think his voice sounds like his, but musically, with the exception of "One Last Gasp," I don't think we sound anything alike, as much as we all love that band.
Jason: Yeah, they're great, and we recently had a chance to play with them and it was good times.

As far as your lyrics go, you guys have really insightful and political songs as opposed to the same old washed-up generic "Oooo, I lost my girlfriend lyrics." Say, for instance, what if in the future M2 was to offer you a chance to do a video on there, would you do it to sort of "broaden people's horizons?"
Jason: Well, there's no fucking way we are going to change the way, well there's no way in hell I'm going to change the way I write because M2 or MTV gives a fuck about us, you know. And if MTV does care about us, they'll let us do what we want to do but fuck them. And I don't see us, getting any of that kind of exposure. OK, if that did happen, I'm sure the content of the video, the visuals, would go along with what we're talking about, but as far as if we'd change what we're talking about, no way.
Mike: Radiohead and At the Drive In I think both had good videos.
Jason: They had good videos, but that's two out of millions. It shouldn't be a commercial, it should be an extension of what you're doing.
Mike: I think that that is something that would ever be in our future it is so far off right now that we are really not predicting…
Jason: We want to make good records and I like to write about things I care about and since I'm a news hound and am big into, I shouldn't say politics, but rather current events, they will always have to do with that. That's just who I am , how I write, and it's reflected in what we do.

As far as history wise, how did you form, and get started as a band?
Jason: My old band in high school, I was in a band with Eric Kane, drummer of Strike Anywhere, and we played loud and fast punk and we never thought anyone would give a fuck about us and give us a chance to put out a record. We were just sort of playing some shows and having fun and Brian McTernan who was then in Battery came up to us and said "Hey, I'd like to put out a record for you guys." He put out the Old Ashes record, the band he used to be in, but other than that he didn't really put out many records, he just liked us a lot and wanted to put us out and it was our senior year in high school and we all realized that at that time that we didn't have the same goals, which was to make records and tour.



peter murphy

Interview by Lonnie Locascio

Your albums were once described as 'earth,' 'fire,' 'water' and 'air.' Is this 'dust'?
Yeah this is sort of…[*gasps and chuckles*] ahh, guess so…that's…God, you've got good research there!

Thanks
The person who cited that was in an MTV interview. It was my old cohort, Paul Statham, who said it at the time…which I really liked. Anyway, yeah! Yes, I think this is passing from form to the real deal, ya know? An 'essence' if ya like. But then again, I don't want to really [*laughs*] back that statement up as if it's my whole intent there really. There's a definite significance in the title of it cause it's kinda like, of the artist…Peter Murphy the icon, the character, taking himself out of the way of the creator with a big 'C'…Being there still presently, in a much more deep going… The album seems to be getting deeper and deeper yet less obscure…And more a progression…progressive is kind of like "beyond" fashion, know what I mean? So it's like that's the quality of a very positive sort of dissolution almost like, ah ya know, *Dust*!

How would you describe the connection *Dust* makes between East and West?
The connection I think is in my bones now. It's almost like I've become more Turkish than say, Mercan (pronounced må-jah) my co-producer partner, who's indeed a very wonderful example of a very traditionally trained Sufi-musician who's moved to the West and has embraced that very western model and is speaking through that filter/language. I'm kind of more Turkish than he is, in some ways and he's more western than I. It's a nice irony thing really. It's a cool segue there and I'm thinking… What I'm hoping people feel and intuit when they hear the album is that this isn't a "world" album and it isn't a "Turkish" album. It's a Peter Murphy album! With all those elements of post punk…very alternative, yet using very incredible Turkish instruments and players alongside a very western approach, which is very authentic and completely powerful in its own way. In a way part of me loves the idea that I'm showcasing my "Turkishness," if you like, in a very natural and authentic way, but by no means is it like a "world" album or "world-tourist" album.

How do you like being referred to as The Grandfather Of Goth?
I thought it was The King Of Goth?

Alright then.
Well, ya know, my answer there is: "The king is dead, long live the king," ya know? [*smiles*]

What inspires you to write?
Ah, there's a pragmatic aspect where I'm very restless, and from a very basic personality point of view I think…I really found what it is that I'm best at doing back in 1979. There's the moment I walked on a stage and got placed in front of a microphone with a pen in my hand with a piece of paper in front of me. That was what I was born almost, it was really natural and without any sort of schooling and it was a "complete" experience. That restlessness happens when I'm not doing it. So I think it's kind of like a burning need to…or like a very deep wish to be noticed [*laughs*] and to be effective and affected and make a mark. But it's also mixed up with a great sense of theatre and the value of the power of knowledge, understanding of the power of performance and music. I definitely still believe that music is the language of the future, for many reasons, not only for populist reasons but because I think music has that power and is definitely going to be the language that we communicate through, the most important issues whether they be overtly important like, ya know, the "Bono-esque" type of politicizing or, I'm talking any kind of messaging, like a great conductor on a much more intuitive level, not just the rationalist level…It's powerful. It's extremely powerful, voice is really powerful. It's the nature of the artist or the speaker speaking.

Do you have any desire to do the "Bono" thing and travel the world visiting the political powers?
I think he's really brave and I think he's working his head off. He's trying his hardest, in the practical sense, to make change. I also believe prayer is just as powerful in a very interior way and that can make change too, which is what I try to do in song, but there's always need for people on the war front out there as well…

What drew you to Rumi and Sufism?
Well, Rumi is one of the many writers, some people may call them mystics, but they're masters really, of the Islamic way, the interior of Islam, which is, in the west, known as "Sufism," but that word mustn't be bastardized into some sort of modernist chic label; it's the knowledge of the truth really. There are people who like to assume spiritual status, the 'name' and 'master' sort of rolls. Well, the true Sufi would never call himself a Sufi because of his awe and respect of the nature of Sufism, if ya like? It's kind of ironic in a way. So if ya ask someone if he's a Sufi or if one calls himself a Sufi, he's not one basically. That's the paradox. [*smiles*] It's not about a movement, it's really about the existential heart of man really…and it's outer form, it's outer shell, is Islam. So then the question's begged: "Well, what is Islam?" Islam essentially means surrendering to yourself, to God…but then, the formula is "know thyself, know thy lord" once you know yourself, you know your lord. It's a very beautiful way really, a very difficult way actually. There are many people who could get lost along the way without a proper guide, or teacher. There are many many charlatans around, especially in America.

How did you become aware of Mercan Dede? I recall something about your wife listening to it and it caught your ear?
Yeah, It was one of those synchronistic moments. I'd been carrying the album around for a long time and I sort of made a false start on recording this album (which is now what is *Dust*) back in 1999 just after the Bauhaus tour and I got as far as booking studio time and I was in London ready to start recording, but that particular week Red Ant had unfortunately went bankrupt, which was actually good really because that album wouldn't have been this album. [*smiles*] Yeah, I mean I needed a lot of patience really. I had this intent to make an album for two years, well, for ages, and when that one stalled, the first attempt, due to sort of difficult circumstances. Actually, wow! In retrospect, that was all really very positive because otherwise this (*Dust*) would never have happened! I'm so happy… I was intuiting when this album was going to come 'out' of me. Once I heard Mercan's album, I knew that was one of the first impulses that gave that wish and that intention a manifest form, and I heard in his own album an echo, a sense of what it was I was hearing for this album. One thing led to another and I met up with him immediately and there on the spot, I made a commitment. I said, "We are going to work on this album!" Then I spent a year touring and after which we got around to starting it.

So we almost got another entirely different Peter Murphy album earlier as well!
Yeah, well, I was there, you know, on the ground, going with all guns firing! The initial songs, I have them still. Some of the lyrics actually found there way to getting on *Dust*. Well, some aspects of them…not all of them, but yeah, I've got a whole album of demos I listen to now and there's some really good stuff there. This was written on the spot actually (*Dust*). I wanted to limit the time that we would make the album. Ya know, write, record and mix and that ended up being ten weeks, here in Montreal. I wanted him to go in early and prepare some simple soundscapes and rhythms that I could then use as a sort of platform and then I took over and wrote the whole album and songs in a ten day period, after which we basically spent a very fluent, very easy, creative rest of the eight weeks complementing those songs.

Did the Bauhaus reunion experience breathe new life into you?
I think yeah, definitely. Before that there was a kind of, not creative block really, but a sort of stagnation, where I was trying to muster up this album. I had written it but it was like… nothing was coming through properly. The right sort of configurations weren't really sitting right. The Bauhaus thing, as you probably know, was only supposed to be one show, in L.A. That was a loaded question really once
the other three…Daniel, David and Kevin started to call me in the space of a week and started to proposed the idea. It was important and crucial, to me, that if Bauhaus were to even perform again, it would have to be completely authentic and meaningful and not just

like a 'reunion.' That was a tall order theoretically, and as it turned out, as you know, it was completely relevant. It turned into a two world tour and a brilliant live album and a brilliant new recording of "Severance" where Daniel, if Daniel doubts his genius, which he often does, but if you just listen to the live version of "Severance" and the studio recording of it… Well, it's amazing what he does with one guitar!

I just saw Daniel in Austin the other night.
What's it like?

It was really good. He played "Slice of Life," some Love and Rockets and even Tones on Tail.
Ok, so like he's got John DiSalva on drums?

Right.
What else has he got?

A bass player. Can't recall his name?
Is that it? Was he running tapes and stuff?

Just a bit. I noticed on Tones on Tail. But it was very minimal really.
Well done. Good for him! I haven't heard the album. I heard a couple of demos he played me back in '99. I guess that comprises one of the songs on his album really? Is it very much like lots of loops running and stuff?

Yes, the actual album is very electronic oriented really. It's as if Daniel isn't using or showcasing his brilliant guitar work on the album as much as he does so well live.
It's purposeful…because he's got a hang-up about himself as "Daniel the guitarist." I think, personally. I'm the first one to always try to encourage him and sort of point him back to…ya know, he was a genius the first moment he started playing! He didn't have to prove anything. I'm always trying to encourage him to recognize that. being a guitarist is no less, than…anything, you know what I mean? Daniel is very creative and anything he does is always gonna have something very cool about it.

I really like how he adds his guitar more during live performances onto the electronic background, almost overpowering it. It seems it'd be so much better if he recorded the songs that way in the studio.
Right. Well, that's because he's not a "guitarist" like he says, that's just like an instrument he makes noises with. And that's why he's a great guitarist, in a very unique way. He's wonderfully inept, like all of us are. That's what makes it really. He has that beautiful freedom from restraints of too much knowledge about music really. [*smiles*] Know what I mean?

Speaking of guitar playing, you've slowly increased your acoustic guitar playing tour after tour. Have you always been a guitarist as well?
I love playing the guitar, but I'm more a showman. The heart of what I do is my voice, my words and my performance. I love drumming, I love picking up the bass and the guitar…but I'm awful at it, really. It's ok. I know enough to make really good songs but then I'm not pretentious enough, or arrogant enough (hopefully), to remember that other people can't or I can't actually direct other people to offer me what I'm hearing. That's the difference in being a solo artist really and a band. In bands like Bauhaus, everything takes care of itself because you've got all the elements. They take care of their part easily and organically so it all comes together in a very natural way. When I write I don't agonize, it comes easily. I love my old band mates. I'm really proud Bauhaus is out there in it's own sort of mythical world. I don't deny my past, I'm a Bauhaus fundamentalist really!

Bauhaus were one of the few bands to split and then do more individually.
Yeah, right. I see what you mean…yeah, I guess so…yeah.

You mentioned something about your children not quite understanding how you were so famous?
No, because I've not sheltered them from that, but you know, I certainly don't walk around as "Peter Murphy" on stage! I mean obviously not, so, I think that's quite a natural thing for children of people in the public's eye. They don't always make that kind of connection with the public existence because they're waking up with them every morning and being shoved out the door to school and disciplined and hugged and stuff. Now, my daughter's really becoming much more aware of what's happening, and she's now listening to things like Nirvana and The Red Hot Chili Peppers and all this stuff. And she's now realizing that these people are sort of very much admirers of her father, which is really odd, but very thrilling for her, so she's very proud because I'm probably the coolest father she could have at the moment, she thinks. My son asked me last year, while I was touring, "Father, do you talk about us when you're on the stage?" [*laughing*] I said, "Yes, I do actually" and he loved it. I mean, I thought, oh my God, look at him, he's completely thriving on this idea of "mass attention." He's completely charismatic as well, so I thought, "Oh my God, he's gonna be like me," I think! He just loved that I mentioned his name! And he'd ask "Do the people from the newspapers ask about me?" [*laughing*] and I said "Yes, they do!"

Well be sure to tell him we asked about him today!
Hilarious! I said wait a minute, I'm the star here!

What makes Peter Murphy happy? When not busy recording, touring…etc.?
What makes me happy is being able to walk out of the house and feel a vibe off of people… and give them something…What makes me happy is also actually being in a different culture and locking in with it, everyday. It's like you're always in a space where you're a foreigner, a stranger in a strange land. It's a cool feeling really. You have a feeling of success everyday in a way, because you somehow learn more and more about it and you're having to interact with it. It's a nice feedback, a counter to getting into that sort of jadedness that is possible when you're surrounded in your own culture.

Famous yet free!
Well, I wouldn't call myself "famous" someone like Bono is famous…or Brittany Spears… I'm just legendary! [*laughs*]

Do you think you'll ever do Bauhaus again? Do you think you guys will get back together, if even just to record an EP or…
I can't, no, that's my whole thing about it. I don't like short weekend visits away, I mean, it's either permanent or not really.



So if it were to happen it would have to be permanent?
It would have to be...well, not permanent but committed, at least a couple of albums and full-out touring and such... but I don't think that will happen.

Daniel's press sheet said something about how he didn't want to be in a band anymore, and at this point in his life he wants to do his own thing.
Yeah, he's always felt like that. Back in Bauhaus he had that sort of urge. What'd he say? That's sort of like saying I don't want to...have a leg? I dunno. I understand that in a way, sort of, but I think it's emotionally based. It's ok, it's alright, sure, that's fine. [*laughing a bit uneasily*] ok then, alright, ya know! I mean what's a "band?" it's just doing what you do best. What's "performance," ya know? It's not a band, it's the same act as what you're doing now anyway. So, what's the difference Danny?[*sounding a bit 'hurt'*] But that's ok...

It's a shame!
Yeah it is. Yeah, it's a shame because it's like there's an audience who could really get something out of it as well.

You've always had an incredible stage presence, even back in Bauhaus, and your wife is an acclaimed choreographer; does she assist you with your moves?
Well actually, when I first met her, she called my manager to ask me to audition for a part in a film project that she had and then I realized that she was a modern dance choreographer. I started attending some of her modern dance pieces, and I really liked them and I asked her to start coaching me or give me some basic exercises which would stretch and maybe give me some ideas, but I realized my own sort of bastardized form of moment and dance then were enough in a way... But then we just like ignored that and got married! She then went on to direct the "Cuts You Up" video and also "A Strange Kind Of Love," as well as the choreography for the "Final Solution" video. She's really quite an amazing person actually.

Why re-record "My Last Two Weeks" and "Subway?"
It was at Mercan's insistence. When I mixed the live *Just for Love* album here at the Planet Studios, which was a kind of way of testing out the ground for possibly working here on the album, that worked out well because I really liked the studio a lot. I invited Mercan to come listen to the final mix playback and he was nicely unaware of what is "Peter Murphy's" past in a way. When he heard it, he was literally blown away with the album! He was completely taken away with it actually. That was the next level of our relationship, where he focused and noticed the "voice"... The central, most meaningful part of "Peter Murphy" were the lyrics and the voice. So he wanted to start up from the voice, and that went along well with my own idea of wanting to write the album, on the spot, in the studio, from the voice, first and foremost, and then we would sort of layer those aspects and complement those compositions later, which is what happened basically. During that playback, he really was blown away with "Subway" and "My Last Two Weeks," and insisted that we should record those for the album, which would, in his words, offer a bridge for the hardcore audience who are maybe thrown a curve with this album. I went along with it. Though the question was begged, by me, "Why release 'Subway' for the third occasion?" I insisted then that "Subway" was incomplete, in a sense and I wanted to add an epilogue verse, because the song deals with an inner voice of conscience talking to a third person, giving advice and warnings and with the ultimate promise that "there's a place where we can meet." In this version, I wanted to then expose the personality, the identity of that inner voice, that character, in the epilogue and final new verse. So the verse describes that identity or he describes himself with the finale... Now you've been successful and there's a place where we will meet. So...Come to the show and we'll meet!

What are your thoughts on world events at the moment, with the Middle East and etc.?
Right, well that's been going on for years. Its just like, ya know, the pimple's starting to burst, ya know, and it's kind of like, for God's sake! First, I think the suicide bombing has to stop. I mean it's awful. It's one thing to be justifiably defending yourself against Israeli troops, but innocent people? That's a very bad move there. On the other hand, Sharon's a complete fascist, ya know, and I think he's playing with fire. I dread to think... well, you know, the fact that they're not letting in journalists there is a real indication that here's some serious shit going down there that's not cool at all, you know and that's awful, I hate that. They've gotta be careful, the Israelis have to be careful, really careful around there. But that seems to be the ongoing problem, isn't it? God knows what Bush is gonna do with this whole headline of rooting out the terrorism worldwide. If he invades Iraq, then that could be a serious mistake really, a little bit overbombastic because the Middle East may really start exploding. If there's a power vacuum left there, God knows what's going to fill it? And then what's he gonna do? Is he gonna keep an army there forever? It's just the nature of debate, ya know, the last recourse in an argument is war.

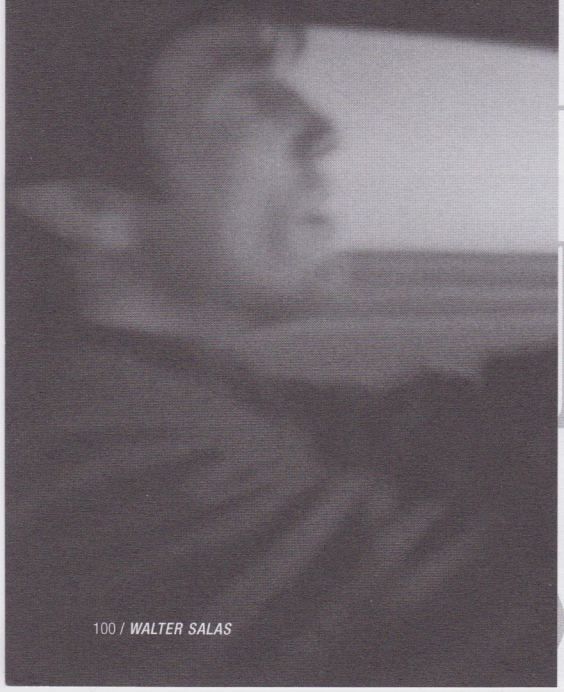
What can ya do?
Pray and be a cool person... and know yourself. But you know we're given all these tests, I think, to batter out and find out the proper ethic really, but, ya know... We could get into a whole three hour conversation about ethics and religion and all that stuff, but that's another thing, isn't it? Musicians have the most power, I think, ultimately, in music. If you think about the Israeli problem, what are ya gonna do? It's obviously very volatile. You've got to give the Palestinians their own autonomy completely; but at the same time, it's not all Arafat's fault, either. You've got to stop these completely polarized radicalized crazies! Trying to destroy Israel, that's just not at all cool, you just can't do that. Personally I think it'd be a really great idea if Jerusalem was made into a world religious city which was run by a kind of council of all the religious representatives, so that it was kind of like a neutral place... a neutral zone where it was purely about religious belief.

In a perfect world.
I think that's entirely possible.
It's sort of like that anyway; there are specific religious quarters and councils that have their areas already. It's a very holy place that's historically very crucial for all the religious fractions really, anyway.

That's the difference in being a solo artist really and a band. In bands like Bauhaus, everything takes care of itself because you've got all the elements. They take care of their part easily and organically so it all comes together in a very natural way

The Roots of My Reckoning:

One Evening with Walter Salas-Humara, The Silos Main Man



You have lived throughout the country and spent time in Florida, New Jersey, L.A., and now New York. The question is: Why move back to New York?
I went back to New York because I feel great living there. I was born in New York, and it is the city in which I feel most comfortable in the world. I feel there's more people like me in New York than there is in any other place in the world, so I feel very comfortable there. Plus, I get to speak both languages all the time, especially in my neighborhood.

Which is?
East Village. It's just great. New York has everything.

But L.A. doesn't?
Not really. I mean, the thing about L.A was that everybody was so isolated. L.A. is a work town. L.A. is great if, well, this is speaking for somebody who did not grow up there, because I think that if you grew up there and you're tied to the place it is different, but if you live there...Well, people move there to work essentially. If your work is going great, than it is great. It's really hard to keep up a social life where you are inter-connecting with people from different walks of life and different fields, even tangentially related fields. Let's say you are an artist in L.A., the film industry is so strong out there, and essentially everybody is from the industry, so that even if you are a visual artist you are trying to become a production designer, or something like that. If you are a composer, you are trying to do soundtracks or something, or you're an actor. It's not like New York and say you're an actor, you meet architects and painters who are really painters and theatre people who are really theatre people, not just trying to get into the next big Cameron film, or the next Fox show. It's just healthier somehow and has a much longer tradition obviously. That's was a really long answer, sorry, you should have stopped me.

You've said that you want to write more songs in Spanish. Why is that so important?
I think that's it's kind of just...Well, there's many rock'n'roll bands from South America who sing in Spanish, but you don't really hear them that much in the States, and you definitely don't hear them on white radio, or whatever you want to call it—popular radio. Not that you hear our stuff or ever will (*laughs*). There's not really, or at least to my knowledge, not too many American bands or bands based in the states that sing in other languages much.

Los Lobos?
Yes, Los Lobos, that's true. I guess they would be the obvious ones. I just want to be part of it, I guess. I'd love to see people like me, who are essentially American but have a Latin background, or Latin people, enjoy the rock music and come out to our shows. It hasn't happened yet, but I think that if I sing in Spanish more, it would be a possibility that Latin people would buy our records and come to our shows. It would be very exciting to have different types of people coming to the shows. It makes for a better experience for everybody.

Would you ever market specifically to a Spanish language audience?
Well, there's not much I can do, I just write the music, and I don't really do the marketing.

But would you tell Checkered Past, your label, to do it?
I've always tried to do that for years and years. It's an uphill battle, unless you have a Latin label that deals with Latin radio stations. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of barriers between the different groups in this country.

I would just like to see it happen in general on every level, for the type of thing I see on the street in New York happen more so in other parts of the country and to happen in the arts and in all society, really. It's like what I was saying before, it's not like it's something new.



In fact, you've said that you would "like to be the one to bring it together." Are you talking about bringing these disparate groups together via your music?
I would just like to see it happen in general on every level, for the type of thing I see on the streets in New York to happen more so in other parts of the country and to happen in the arts and in all society, really. It's like what I was saying before, it's not as if it's something new. There's Los Lobos obviously, and there are a million bands in Mexico and South America.

Or there's guys like El Vez.
Yeah. But there's a zillion Mexican rock bands too. They just aren't known. In other words, there's the Latin rock bands from Mexico and South America that are known in the Latin community, but only Latin people go to see them. Then there's the "white people and black people" in the United States who don't see them, and vice versa. I think that we are somehow in the middle. Los Lobos is the best example because they get a crossover from both crowds.

What accounts for your popularity in Europe, especially Spain? Is it because you speak Spanish?
Well, we don't have that many Spanish songs, but it's definitely because my antecedents. My grandparent's generation and before were all Spanish and that counts for something over there. I don't know why. The language barrier just doesn't exist with the journalists for one thing. I do all the interviews in Spanish. It might be like, this guy is great, he speaks Spanish, let's put him on TV. It just makes it easier for them to make more stuff happen.

You once said that "CDs have created a new market for old music and obscure is far less obscure." Now that we have lived through the initial heyday of CDs, is your own music less obscure now?
(*laughs*) God, no. I think really there's good and bad things, well, I'm not speaking about CDs now, but about the demystification of the recorded music manufacturing process. It's super cheap now, and everybody can be a part of it, and consequently there are really a lot of people who are a part of it now. There's so many more bands out there and labels putting out music than there were ten years ago. It's good, because the public has unlimited choices of CDs to buy if they look for them, but it does make it harder for each individual group. It makes it harder for anybody starting out, or a band like us that has been around awhile but has never gotten on the radio to reach people because the pipeline is so clogged with, well I don't want to say amateurs, but hobbyists who are just out there because anybody with 5,000 dollars can put a record out.

You always feel that your last record is your best. Do you feel that this record is your best, and is that being supremely over-confident, or just excited and innocent?
I think it's because I never listen to the old records (*laughs*). The only record I remember is the last one (*laughs*). You're always into the thing you are into at the moment, and it is more exciting because the only real life is the present. I think for me too it's the personal happiness level I am at now, which is much

higher than where I was at ten years ago, or at any point previously really. Also, the communication level between Drew, Konrad and I as a band is a much higher level of musician communication as well as personal friendship than had ever existed in the Silos before.

An article in *Musician* magazine that described the making of the RCA self-titled record mentioned how you and Bob would communicate with your eyebrows. It was that instinctive. Has it grown to be that way with this line up? What quirks do you have, or how do you lead each other?

I can't describe that process really, it's just... Well, you're a musician, so you know how it is. We're all pretty different. It was different with Bob and me. Bob and me were very similar, and in some ways we were identical, almost like we were twin brothers or something like that. That was a very easy connection. With Konrad, Drew and I, our musical tastes aren't drastically different, but they are different. Even our styles of playing are very different. Drew is very melodic, and I don't want to say technical, but on the flashy side. I am the more, um, I don't how to describe it, not primitive, but more rhythmic oriented, than Konrad, even though I am supposed to be the melodic guy. He's much more explosive and experimental than the typical player within the context of the music we're making. It's a more interesting combination I think than most of the groups within the type of music that we do. I don't even know if I came close to answering your question (*laughs*).

You said that *Heater* was the most collaborative record you made, the most Silos of the Silos records, so how would you compare the process of making this record to that?

Um, I think what you're quoting about *Heater* was about the writing, not about the recording of the record. What I was talking about when I was talking about *Heater* was that there were a lot of different writers who I was writing with, so in that sense it was more collaborative in terms of the input on the songs. What's really different about the new album and *Heater* is that the new record is really a band record. It's us playing in the studio, and *Heater* was much more of a bits and pieces, people popping over just to play on one track, or a track here and there, then a week later someone else would pop over. Or I'd be writing with somebody, and I'd say, how about singing a back up vocal on this song over here? *Heater* has that sound, that process, multi-layered sound. The new record is much more the band playing in a room together more or less.

But how did the Euro DJ remix of *Heater* come about?

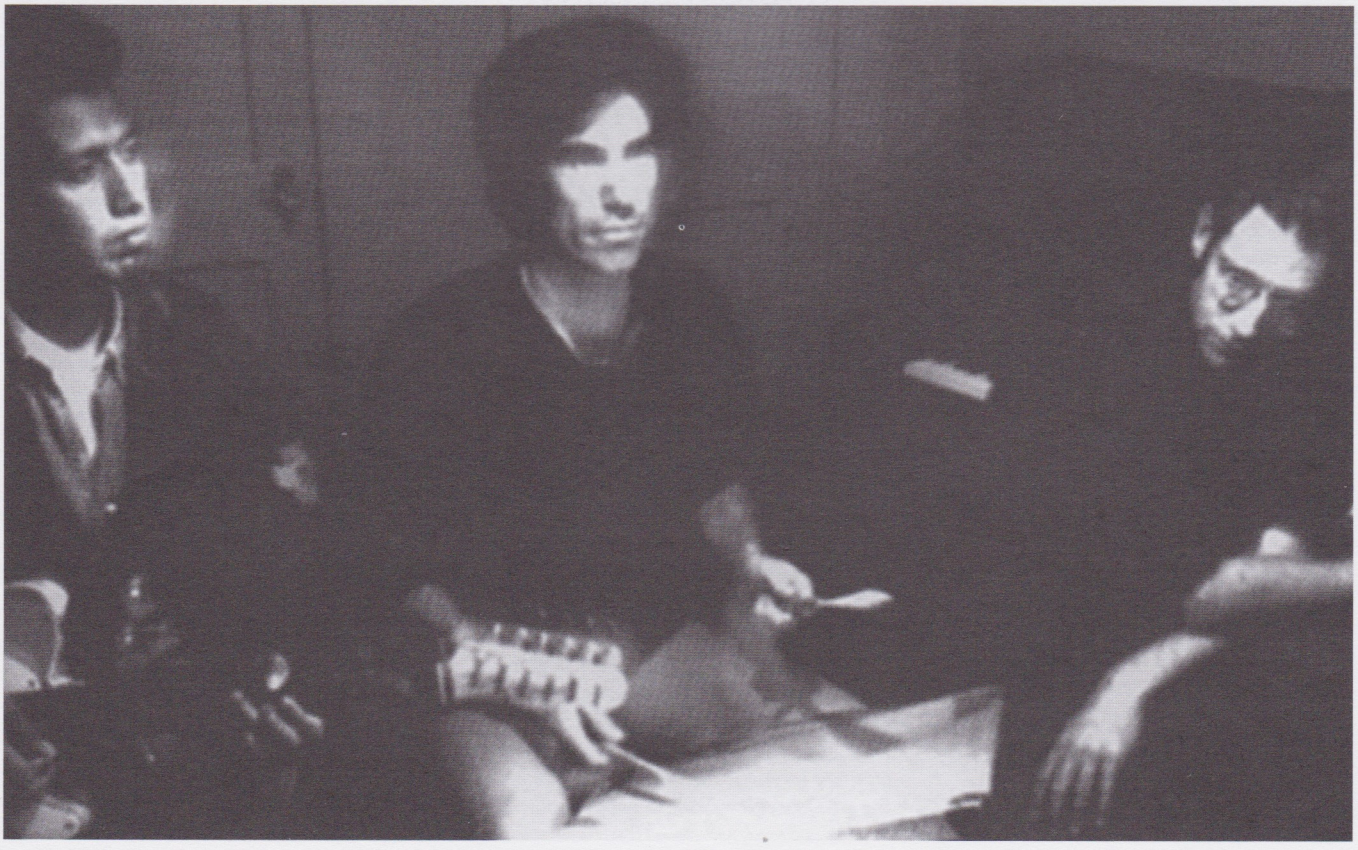
Oh god. We do records for this...Well, this German record label we used to be on had an offshoot label called Return to Sender, which is a limited edition mail order series where they get groups to do, or ask groups to be a part of it, and groups usually send live stuff or rare b-sides or something different than what they normally do. We had already done a couple of them in the past. Well, we did one in the past that was a live album.

***Leave*?**

Right. They asked us to do another one, and I said great, because I think it's a cool series and the packaging is really beautiful. I was like, what can I send them? I just kind of mentioned that to them. It just came up. It came out of my mouth before I even thought of what I was saying! I was like, what about a dance remix record, just kind of throwing it out there, and he got all excited about it. He was like, great, blah blah blah. He called me back, and asked, when was it going to happen. I was like, oh my god, what have I gotten myself into? So I called a few people who were friends of mine. Well, I called some friends who had done that kind of thing, and called some friends who had never done it, just to see if they would be interested in doing their own version. Everybody was into it. Essentially, it's just the vocals from the record.

Do you have any input in terms of the instrumentation?

I had absolutely nothing to do with it at all, except making phone calls and sending the split tracks. Usually a remix is the vocal mix, and they create a whole track. It's interesting. Some of it's what you expect from dance music. Some of it sounds like club music, and then some of it is unique and different, like Ryan Hedgecock, who you may or may not know. He's the guitar player from Lone Justice. He did this Lee Scratch Perry dub thing that was real cool and different and Chris Maxwell, who was in the Gun Bunnies, and Chris from Skeleton Key did the one that starts the record, which is really cool because it's a real heavy bass line and a laid back



drum loop and then the rest of it is the sounds of horses galloping and whinnying and stuff, and then the vocal and some other ocean kind of sound.

Sometimes you're tagged as a folksy guy or rootsy guy, but you have said that you enjoy Sonic Youth and Pavement as much as the next person, so why do people dump you in the *No Depression* category.
Because it's easier to talk about stuff if you talk about it in a category. Of course, the name of the group falls into that as well.

Country name and image?
Well, not in terms of the record covers.

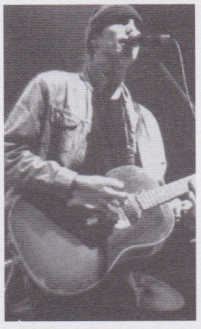
Well, the self-titled record has a bird on the front. I can't remember- was it a crow?
A peacock (*laughs*). The background is Tuscany! Yeah, I think it's because my guitar playing style is so primitive. The primitive nature of my guitar style is what's associated with roots music.

To quote *Musician*, "He writes from the guitar up, and uses a lot of chord changes to move around a simple vocal line." Is that the way you see it?
Yeah, definitely more so back then. I have broken into some realm of melody lately (*laughs*). The new record is going to be a lot more melodic in terms of vocal melodies compared to what the guitar is doing. I am getting a lot more comfortable with that, so it's changing, but the direct quote you are talking about there—well, what I was talking about—on the old records there's hardly any melody at all. I am singing exactly what the guitar is playing. So, for me to make up complex melodies I would have to add a bunch more chords, but I'm not doing that as much anymore. I'm more changing the melody of the voice and keeping the guitar simple.

You use a free association style in your lyric writing, which I associate mostly with poetry. What makes an image or a character worthy of a song to you?
There's, well there's many ways, but there's two ways that come to mind. One is the song that forthrightly speaks to an issue that has great relevance, be it a spiritual issue or an emotional state, that has an universal picture that has a story, or the words are just what they are. Then there's the other, which is... Well, the words are just cool. Like Kurt Cobain, I don't know what he's talking about, but it sounds so great in "Smell's Like Teen Spirit." I don't know what he's talking about. It just sounds really right.

Or there's the case of Michael Stipe.
Well, he's an interesting case because in the early songs you couldn't understand a word the guy was saying anyway. That was really interesting, his use of voice as... Well, there's no difference between his voice or the guitar or sax. It didn't matter, because he wasn't singing words you could understand anyhow, and it didn't really matter. Which, ultimately, in most rock music it doesn't really matter because no one really wants to hear the words anyway. First and foremost, they always have to sound cool, unless it's a ballad where there's very little instrumentation and you're really hearing the voice up front and you're not dancing around. You're actually listening to what the person is saying.

You have to just continue to be interested, or interest yourself in completely new things or figuring out new ways of saying things that you are interested in, even if you're saying the same things over a long period of time. You know, come up with new ways of saying things or doing it to keep everybody interested.



You've said that you try to make music without pretension. How hard is it to not be pretentious both lyrically and musically after such a long time?
(*laughs*). Wow. You have to just continue to be interested, or interest yourself in completely new things or figuring out new ways of saying things that you are interested in, even if you're saying the same things over a long period of time. You know, come up with new ways of saying things or doing it to keep everybody interested. For me, it's been to try and sing more in Spanish and also, as I've said before, to try and be more melodic with the voice against the simple guitar changes rather than relying on the guitar changes to be a road map for what the voice is doing. The other cool thing that we are doing now is that the rhythm section is just not supporting the song, they are creating their own music and their own musical style within the group as opposed to, especially with the early records, where everybody was trying to make the songs sound like the way they were supposed to sound, like there was no real identity in the players themselves. Now, there's very much a sense of personalities besides the songs.

You didn't have that with J.D Foster and other players?
Yeah, we did, but not in the same sense. With Ian and Bob early on, they were such hard-liners about the song being the most important thing and any extraneous personal touches were, or tended to be... Well, we surrounded ourselves with people who were like-minded. It's a lot more wide-open right now.

At one time, it was said that you tried to make your drummer and bass player play less perfectly. Is that still how you operate with these guys?
I guess basically. Who said this (*laughs*)?

Well, I think it means you wanted to have a more natural, less processed sound.
That's true.

Not a drum machine feel.
Correct. But I think that the best rock grooves are just like that. It's behind the beat, or all around the beat, it's not right on top of the beat. That's what makes me want to groove to it.

This is an incomplete list of people you have produced. Vulgar Boatmen, 30 Foot Satellite, Woolridge Bros., Jim Roll. What makes them worthwhile?
I've produced some records, but I am not actively pursuing a career as a producer. I enjoy it tremendously, but they all pretty much just came to me. They are just people I knew. I guess I just got lucky that they were all good. The Jim Roll record, particularly, I am very proud of, not because it's better than the others, but I think we made the greatest strides in going so far beyond what he has done previously, or what he thought he was capable of in terms of stylistic inspiration and studio production. I don't know if you have heard that record or not, but essentially he's a folk singer and his earlier albums were very much folk rock, and we went all these different directions, from real processed, weird, computer type of stuff to carnival, kind of Tom Waits type stuff, to great country pop stuff, to bluegrassy stuff. We went back and forth. For awhile, I thought I was just trying to please myself, but in the end, he really threw himself into it so hard, and it all pulled together in an interesting way, so of all the records I have worked on as a produc-

er, that's the one I am most proud of, because it really holds together as a record. The casual listener doesn't even realize that it swings wildly from one style to another, but still holds together for the casual listener. But if you get inside of it, you're like, this is interesting how they did this style, or took this kind of lyric, and did it this way.

As you facilitated his discovery of what he could do on his own record, does it rub off on you and how you think about your own music?
It happens in all type of ways, not just producing records. I think that the biggest thing has been film pieces, because on the film music, you actually get assignments, essentially. You don't always get to do what you want to do, and you're given assignments, like sometimes in terms of different styles of music. You're given goals to accomplish. Like it's a happy scene, or there's happy things going on in the scene, but this particular character is feeling some other type of emotion, so you're supposed to do music that shows the contrasts. I can think of any number of scenarios. It's just the idea of trying to achieve goals through your music that were different types of goals than what I would normally try to do with songs opened up a lot of ideas for me that would cross over into record making.

In 1998, you were listening to Richard Buckner, Liz Phair, Buena Vista Social Club, Elliot Smith, and other people. Who are you listening to today?
Lately, in the morning I have been listening to Jimmy Smith.

He's still alive, right?
He still plays live. I'm talking about his 1950s stuff, organ, drums and bass. *The Incredible Jimmy Smith* on Blue Note. But they're some cool bands around right now. I like the Centro-Matic album with the airplane terms in the title. I saw them play this last tour with the guy from Varnaline. But I can't remember anything, much less what I did yesterday. But I like Mercury Rev a lot, but they're not new.

There was so much hype surrounding the band around 1990 when the band was called the best unsigned band before you released the RCA record. Do you feel that you have to live with the burden of being the band that almost made it before getting dropped by RCA and caught in the collapse of Watermelon Records?
That's just a function of being older. You always have to live with all your work, unless you forget about it, or try to, like I do (*laughs*). There's just no way around. Everybody naturally wants to discover something new. That's everyone's natural tendency. The new bands get more attention. That's just a fact of the way human nature operates.

But so many of the bands that you were associated with during that time period have long disappeared, unlike you. That's a difference. They don't have to live with the legacy because they don't even play music anymore. You're still in the clubs and are on small record labels.
But it's never been any different for us.



That's just a function of being older. You always have to live with all your work, unless you forget about it, or try to, like I do (*laughs*). There's just no way around. Everybody naturally wants to discover something new. That's everyone's natural tendency. The new bands get more attention. That's just a fact of the way human nature operates.

Even when you were in *Newsweek* and *Rolling Stone*?
It wasn't any different. Not really, not much anyway. The only difference was I was different and didn't know as much, but the actual places we were playing were not particularly different. At the height of whatever there was, there were more peripheral people, like you were talking about earlier, that go to clubs in downtown areas because they read about them in the paper and thought they were cool… There was more of that, but the people who knew anything about music, or were actually fans of the music that we do, it was still more or less at the same level. There are actually a small number of people that really are actually interested in music. There's some people who sell a lot of records, and everybody "has to have" their records, but don't necessarily appreciate that record. They just buy it, because they are supposed to buy it.

You admired bands like Cowboy Junkies and Metallica because at one time, they were able to sell millions of records without radio play. Is that still possible?
Sure, it's possible, if you are in the right place and right time, and you're really good and strike that chord, or you're both. You're an unbelievably good mass marketer and you strike a particular chord in a particular period. Even when you take some of the people like… Well, I am not going to go there. Some people are just really great at marketing their stuff, and that's really their focus.

How do we distinguish between a Silos record and a solo record?
One of the problems I have had with the name the Silos and the whole alt-country kind of connotation is that the name has been a little of a thorn in my side. Once you are associated with a certain name, like Mick Jagger could put out solo records until the end of time, and they can be great records, but nobody would even care. People only care, myself included, only if Charlie Watts and Keith Richards are playing, otherwise his stuff is irrelevant completely. So, it's been the same with me trying to get away from the Silos name. I put out a solo record and nobody buys it. I've only been able to sell records under the Silos, because that's how I started selling them, and that's what people want to see. So, I've let go of that. So that's what I'm doing, I am just going to make Silos records. But there's not a big difference. That's the answer to your question.

Is their part of you that remains as curious as when you were an art student?
Absolutely. I wouldn't be in this business. That's the only reason to do it. That's the

only way any artist stays an artist for his or her whole life, because otherwise you are not an artist, you're just a factory producing stuff.

Your parents were on vacation in New York when the Cuban revolution occurred. Are they proud that they ended up raising you here and you became a musician? If they raised you in Cuba, there would be no Silos.

Most definitely. Are my parents proud of me, is that the question?

Are they content with what you do?

They don't care what I do. They're just like any other parents, well, my father has been gone for a long time, but my mother is still alive. All they ever cared about was whether or not I was happy, and it was the same with my two brothers. They didn't push us into any particular fields or anything, or say you ought to do this, or be a certain type of person.

But there is a difference between being an immigrant by choice and an immigrant by exile.

It was a choice. The circumstances were that they happened to be in this country when the revolution happened and they did not go back. They could of gone anywhere, they didn't have to stay in the U.S., or gone to any number of Spanish speaking countries. They stayed here because of the security. At the time, Franco was in power in Spain, and to this day, there's no real law in South America anywhere, possibly in Costa Rica a little bit. There are not constitutions that mean anything in most countries in the world, with the exception of this one and a few other Western European ones. They just didn't want to raise their children in a place like that anymore. That's why they stayed in the United States.

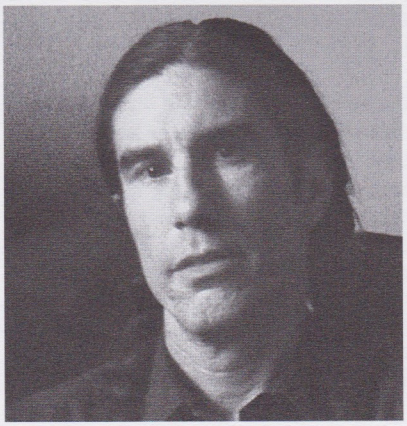
Do you envision yourself doing a collaborative record like the Setters (Alejandro Escovedo, Michael Hall) again?

Absolutely, I'm always up for it. I'm always up for anything, really.

How did the Setters record come about?

It was all Mike basically. There used to be a festival in Berlin called Berlin Independence Day, similar to the idea of South by Southwest, except that it was in Berlin. Mike went over and played it right after the Berlin Wall fell and had a great time. There was an offshoot of it in Prague too, so he got to play Prague as well. He was all flipped out about it. Back then, and I don't know if it's the same way anymore, but back with the West German government, there was money around for the arts. This particular festival had quite a bit of it. It was a free trip to Europe and you got to play these cool gigs in Berlin and Prague. It was great. So, the next year Mike called this guy Wolfgang and wanted to do it again, but the guy said, you know, we can't do the same groups two years in a row. Mike really wants to go right, so he says, but I've got this band (*laughs*). The guy was like, oh yeah, who is in it? He just started naming people that this guy would know.

Sure, it's possible, if you are in the right place and right time, and you're really good and strike that chord, or you're both. You're an unbelievably good mass marketer and you strike a particular chord in a particular period. Even when you take some of the people like... Well, I am not going to go there. Some people are just really great at marketing their stuff, and that's really their focus.



So essentially it was a scam to get to Prague?

Yeah, he said, Walter's in it, Alejandro's in it. The guy was like really, that sounds great. What is it called? I don't know where he came up with the Setters, but that's the first thing that came out of his mouth. Wolfgang was like, that's great, we'll do it. So as soon as Mike hangs up the phone he dials my number (*laughs*). Hey, do you want to go to Berlin on Nov. 10th, or whenever it was? I was like, yeah, sure, I'll go. Then he called up Al. They lived in the same town, Austin, and I was living in New York, so we met at the airport, JFK. Literally, I did not have one more conversation about it. I didn't even have a conversation with Al. I just drove out to the airport. I did not even bring anything, not even any instruments. I met them at the airport. I don't think Mike even brought anything. Al brought a guitar. We've got one guitar and three guys (*laughs*). We showed up there, and they provide plane tickets, but not a place to stay. I am thinking that they have this worked out. I am looking at it as an art project of some kind, and we show up in Berlin and they're like, do you know anybody we can stay with in Berlin? (*laughs*) I was furiously making phone calls to get us a place. Actually, Mike got a place to stay, and I stayed at a friend's loft. The people upstairs were a band, right, so we went up there and rehearsed the set, in which we basically did three of our songs each. Then we had to pick a song to do together as the Setters, and we picked "I Want to Be Your Dog." They had a keyboard there, and Mike plays keyboard as well as guitar. So, we decided Mike's going to be the keyboard player, Al's going to be the guitar player, and I am going to be the drummer, but there were no drums. So I grabbed a box. When we did the gig... Well, it was one of those weird deals, I don't know how the rumors get started, maybe it was Wolfgang saying, oh yeah, you've got to see the Setters, because we had never played one note, but by the third day we played a really beautiful jazz club called the Quasimodo, and it was fucking packed, and they pulled up a mobile truck and recorded the show. Mike got to use this beautiful piano and I had like a box, but they put a contact mic on the floor so they could hear my foot. It turned out to be a really great night, and everybody got excited about it. This German label that saw the show offered us a record deal on the spot. We just went back home thinking, that was fun, whatever, but the label kept calling us. That's how we ended up putting out the record. Watermelon just licensed it.



So, when the 1970s coughed up punk rock you had art geeks like the Buzzcocks whining about girls and orgasms, and you had Slaughter and the Dogs trying to outrun coppers, drink down a few beers, and write "Where Have All The Boot Boys Gone" about soccer thugs. It's basically like, do you want new wave or the truth? If punk was Marc Bolan and David Bowie stripped of all make-up and glitter pretense, then Slaughter and the Dogs is the broken mirror of punk rock. Recently united, they tumbled across the U.S. in a non-stop pogo (it's hard in tight sweltering leather pants at age 44!) for the first time ever, and even if kids looked lost (hey, it's too slow!), they still felt the hallow ground of punk's Manchester warriors.



Slaughter and the Dogs

When Slaughter and the Dogs opened up for the Sex Pistols at a labor hall in Manchester in 1976, how much did you know about the Sex Pistols at that time?

Wayne: We knew absolutely nothing at that time. And no one basically did in Manchester, apart from Devoto from the Buzzcocks who had seen them in London. We were called punk by a guy named Neil. He did an article and called us punk, but we didn't know what the fuck it was. And Martin Hannet (Joy Division producer) at that time was calling us punk as well, but we really didn't know what it meant. We thought it was a way of saying we were a bunch of cheeky bastards.

Martin Hannet produced, or at least helped work on, your first 7"?

Mick: Yeah, he did. We met Martin through Josh Ryan, who founded Rabid Records. He said, he's going to produce it, so we said okay. That was that.

What about the band did he seem to like?

Mick: He had seen us a couple of times, because before the Sex Pistols show we were playing around a lot in Manchester and we had a large local following. He just thought we were street, rough-edged, punk rock'n'roll. I guess he warmed to that side of us. We were an honest band in terms of what was happening at the time. I guess he zoned in on that.

You've said that one thing that made you different was that you were not a garage band, that you were street band. Does that mean you had street credentials?

Mick: Absolutely. Street band means, especially in Wythenshawe, Manchester, that your education was on the streets. I mean, at that time there was nothing else. Vast employment, so your options were prison, or having an education. Now, we weren't privy to college education, and very few people are in England, so the street is a term that has grown from being on the streets.

Wayne: It's just a working class background, basically.

You're saying bands like the Clash and Buzzcocks did not have that?

Mick: I can't speak for the Clash, but I can for the Buzzcocks. No, they didn't have that. Absolutely. They went to art school.

Wayne: They were the more cool, intellectual kind of side. We were the more rowdy, get out and thrash it out, if it's good it's good, if it's not, it's not kind of side. We didn't analyze anything at the time, we just wanted to play and have a good time, and kind of escape from the reality of Wythenshawe.

Did you have trouble with the cops?

Wayne: Yeah.

Mick: Yeah, absolutely, when we were young. We had a few run-ins, petty little things that

ones does when you are a misguided youth. *(pauses)* All right, we robbed a few banks *(everyone laughs)*. We were only nine when we did it. We did have some run-ins, but it was a given. That was where we grew up, and that was part of it.

Is it true that you wanted to show that with a little hard work, kids could get out of trouble?
Wayne: Mick and I went to school together at a comprehensive school, which basically had no values whatsoever. There was no kind of future for the kids who went there, and I distinctly remember one of our head masters saying that we would never make anything out of our lives. We'd end up on the dole, or in prison, or at the end of a needle, basically. That's the hard life...We went through a hard life at the beginning. It wasn't hard, hard, hard, like we didn't just eat cheese and soup and all that, but it was a hard life. Manchester is a very hard town, so if you don't stand up for yourself, you get ran over. Things like robbing, things like fighting, things like standing up for yourself, you just got to do that, otherwise you just get shit on basically. And that's something we didn't want happening to us, so we took another way out, which was music and we started playing together and that was our kind of escape from our crappy reality. Now, the pub down the road, where I used to live, was renamed because everybody was thieving. It was really a hard place, we didn't want to have that kind of life. We wanted to make ourselves better.



And Martin Hannet, at that time, was calling us punk as well, but we really didn't know what it meant. We thought it was a way of saying we were a bunch of cheeky bastards.

So when you got signed to Decca, was it a kind of revenge against the headmaster who said you wouldn't be anything?
Mick: Not really revenge, we were just thrilled that we had a shot. So, we really didn't regress and go back and say, up yours. You can think back and reflect on that privately, but no, we were just thrilled. Of course, "Cranked Up and Really High" came out first and was a great success for us in an underground way, so to go to the next level was a major deal, and a dream come true for us.

But while the Sex Pistols talked about "No Future," you guys wanted a future. One of you once said early on, "I want to be Iggy Pop's son." But I think it's hard for some punks to imagine how street punks like yourself were crazy about glam rock with all its make-up and posing?
Wayne: Well, at that time, the only thing that was happening was the glam situation. To tell you the truth, because we don't hide behind any kind of others, we love Bowie, we love Mick Ronson, we love Iggy Pop, and all the stuff that went down in the 1970s.

You've also said that everything that the press said about punk was totally fake.
Wayne: Well, they made up false reports basically about what we were. We weren't a company band, we were just Manchester guys who wanted to play music. We had no kind of message, no political side. Our pop politics were just the street. We didn't go out and make any big issue of it. The press was very anti-Mancunian at that time. It's only since bands like Oasis that Manchester has really been put back on the map. The London press has now accepted what Manchester is, so all the press reports we were getting, because we weren't going up the ass of the London press, basically was sarcastic. Or if it wasn't sarcastic, it was, ok, they are good, but... There was always a but there somewhere. And that but wasn't true, because we knew we were good in our hearts because what we were doing was our kind of stuff. It's not being big-headed or anything like that, it's just that we were confident about what we were doing. We weren't going out there saying, ok, we are going to bring a message to the kids. Our buzz for us was to see 300–400 kids come to a gig and moves their asses for an hour and a half, be that good so they don't go out and steal cars and do vandalism and the rest of the stuff because the only thing they want to do is put their head on their pillow and say, wow, I'm shacked, I've seen a good band.
Mick: Or get their dick sucked. But with us, we were never in a division. Like a lot of London bands were categorized and put into divisions, we were always classic outsiders. When the punk thing got rolling, because when we did the Sex Pistols show, there was like four bands or something...

I think it was the Jam, the Buzzcocks, and you guys.
Mick: Yeah, so when it got rolling there was like, they all had something to say, they all had a message. I found that a little phony, agreeing with what Wayne's original point was. So, that coupled with we were hard to categorize, because we were a rock'n'roll street punk band, we weren't out yabbing, so I think that has to do with Wayne's statement about fakeness. There was a lot of that there out there. But actually, underneath that there were some great bands as well, who were true and honest.

Who would that be to you?
Mick: Are we talking old days or now?

Any.
Mick: The Sex Pistols, the Damned when they first started I thought were fantastic.
Wayne: I associate the Damned with Slaughter because our street kind of education and what we were doing was their kind of gothic, macabre kind of thing. That wasn't punk, what they were playing. They were just doing a good show and thrashing it out. It was loud and noisy, so it got the label punk, but I don't categorize the Damned as punk. I think they are a real good macabre rock'n'roll band.
Mick: Well, the Damned, the Pistols. At the time, we loved the New York Dolls and Iggy Pop...mmm...Lou Reed. We are still drawn back to Bowie and Mick Ronson's music, because that, to me, is timeless stuff. Great songs, great visual overall thing that draws you in. Now, I love Oasis. I think they are fucking great, and they are Manchester guys.

But what about the art school types, like the Fall and Joy Division?
Wayne: Boring. People can get off on it, but I don't give a shit. Basically, it just didn't interest us, did it?
Mick: Not really. I mean I like Johnny Marr as a guitar player (The Smiths). I thought the Smiths had some good stuff. I like Billy Duffy, the guitar player. I think he is good. It's a personal taste, you know. The last thing that came from Manchester that really sparked me was Oasis. I like the Strokes too. I just bought their record.

Tonight at your show, you will have rock-'n'rollers, but like a lot places, you will also have skinheads who will be out and ready to hear "Where Have All the Boot Boys Gone." You seem to have mixed feelings about that song, which is about the United Manchester 1972 type skins, but has been a bit misinterpreted. In some circumstances, you've had to deal with 600 skinheads up front doing sig heils. How do you think that song became so distorted?
Wayne: It's like everything that happens. It's just a basic song about when I used to go see the football matches at Old Tralford. The guys I knew, the bald-headed, fat-belly guys who now have five kids, have all settled down now. But there's always somebody who will pop up a message somewhere and try to find things. "Hell in New York" is the same thing. People tell us we shouldn't play "Hell in New York" anymore, and we wrote it in 1979. Even if you say, I love you, somebody will find a way to say, you're saying I love

you because you like animals or jerking off in a fridge. There's always someone who will come up and say, I know what you're saying in the lyrics you write.

But "Hell in New York" wasn't on the Oi compilation that served as soundtrack to the race riots of 1980 in England.

Wayne: (adamant) We had no control whatsoever. The song was released by Decca records as a single as an opener for a new record, and that is kind of the end of the story.

Mick: I think also that it really reflected what was going on at Wythenshawe at the time. That was his view of what was going on. We are very proud of the song. It's a great song to play, and it has reached a lot of people. Worldwide we play, and in Germany you still get the skinhead element there…But the skins are great guys. They come and enjoy it, get off on it, and we like that. But we don't like when they take the meaning of the song wrong. It's a reflection of what Wayne saw in the time of our youth. The fact that it has appeared on a zillion compilation records is just the way it is.

Mark Brennan (the Business) from Captain Oi records helped you put out the singles collection a few years ago. Does he represent the side of skinheads who can put the song in its right context?

Wayne: I wouldn't say that, because I wouldn't say that Marky is that kind of guy. What he has done is try to his best to help us relaunch the Slaughter project, but what I have seem him do has been in the interest of music, and nothing else.

Mick: He's really instrumental in keeping the new wave/punk/oi on the surface. He really cares, he's a great guy, and he's a friend as well as a business colleague. And we can't say enough words about Mark, he's a nice guy. He puts out stuff that he believes in. That's all we can say about him.

Would you say that you wouldn't be touring and putting out the new record if it wasn't for the 1996 re-union show in Blackpool?

Mick: Sure. Dan Russell invited us to do the "Holidays in the Sun" festival, and it kind of picked up steam from there. It was a great success, then we were invited back a year later, and we went to Japan. It was a natural progression to go in and make another record. We desperately wanted to do that, so it was a natural move.

"Bite Back" was actually engineered by the old drummer of Mott the Hoople. Even though they were associated with the early '70s, they kept their credentials throughout the punk era. The Clash's song "All the Young Punks" from *Give 'Em Enough Rope* is a prime example.

Mick: They were great. Street guys playing great music. They were very true to themselves, and that's how I see Slaughter, and Wayne and I. We are honest in what we put out and hope people like it. Either they like it, or they don't.

Wayne recently said, "We are living in the same disco shit as we did in 1972, and the whole world music thing is totally dumb to me." Is that partially why you are here still making music?

Wayne: Uh, yes.

Mick: Were you on drugs when you said that?

Wayne: Well, it was an official drug. I mean, I think that every time that music becomes stale, it's always good to kick ass. You see, the thing is, Mick and I have never stopped working together. I mean, there's been times when we haven't see each other, but Slaughter has always existed from…

Mick: Our address on Greenbriar road, where we grew up.

Wayne: Since we got the band together, the only thing we've wanted to do is play raunchy rock and hope that the kids come out of the place with a smile on their face.

But what about the 1992 record, *Shocking?* Do you play anything off of that?

Mick: No, we don't.

Wayne: It was only a one off kind of thing. I think we got into it a little too fast.

Mick: There's only half an album on there. As Wayne said, we went into it very quickly. We didn't think it out, and we'll move on (*editor's note- he means push the interview ahead*).

Mick, you worked fairly recently with the singer from Gene Loves Jezebel. How did that come about?

Mick: Michael, right? I did his solo album. He asked me to, that's how it came about.

Had you known him?

Mick: Sure, yeah. He lives in L.A., and I live in L.A., so I knew him because James Stevenson, who was playing with the Jezebels, so Michael wanted to do a solo record and asked if I would help write and produce it with him, which I did.

You did another record on XXX Records too?

Mick: Yeah, I wanted to do that for Mick (Ronson) and dedicate it to Mick. We were talking about it, and decided to make it.

But why didn't the new Slaughter record come out on XXX records?

Mick: Because those were one off things and happened when I was doing different stuff. With the TKO thing, it was a progression from Mark Brennan at Captain Oi, who hooked us up with Mark Rainey, who again, was a total gentlemen, and we can't say enough nice things about him. He's real supportive. So it was hooked up from England to here. We met him when we did "Holidays in the Sun" in San Francisco, and he's a great comrade of ours. He's got a nice aura, and we're very happy to be in business with him too. The XXX thing was kind of a separate thing, you know?

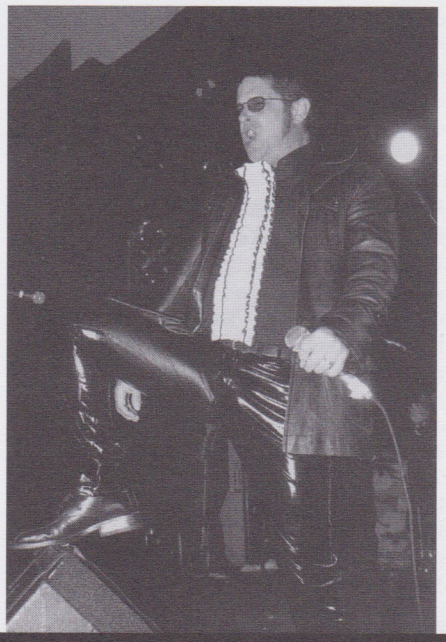
This past year, the Vibrators, Vice Squad, UK Subs, and the Damned came through. It's like America is being invaded all over again by UK punk rock. What separates you from all those other bands?

Mick: That's a good question. Well, I would say that we are individuals. It's unmistakably Slaughter, no matter which way you look at it, or however you hear it, like when you hear Wayne sing.

Wayne: Or when he plays guitar.

Mick: What sets us apart is that we don't conform to anything and we are honest, and we are individual.

Wayne: I'd be ok with what Mick said, but I would just further it by saying we've always done what we wanted to do, and nobody has



People tell us we shouldn't play "Hell in New York" anymore, and we wrote it in 1979. Even if you say, I love you, somebody will find a way to say, your saying I love you because you like animals or jerking off in a fridge…

decided for us. That's why we get along so well, because ever since we were kids we wrote the songs together. It's always been from scratch day one, Mick and myself. We try and control the situation as much as possible. There's ups and downs, but that happens in everybody's way of performing. I think it's important that the new bands take a look around at what was happening in our time, and they'll find it very similar. Maybe that's why we are working a lot as well.
Mick: I also think as well that our fucking show is electric. It's a two way thing with us. We put out as much as we possibly can and get it back from the audience. I think that any Slaughter and the Dogs show…
Wayne: There's feedback.
Mick: It's like a walking million volt fucking factory. We played the Troubador (L.A.) just a few days ago, and the guy there said he hasn't seen as much energy and excitement since AC/DC played there.

…There's always someone who will come up and say, I know what you're saying in the lyrics you write.

That was a long time ago.
Mick: That's a compliment. So I think that people who know us know that our shows are pretty electric.

Wayne, do you regret the time you spent away from the band in France?
Wayne: I still live in France. I don't regret living in France. I regret not being with Mick. I regret that.

What do you guys think that kids today hear in the old records that you might not ever had expected them to hear 20 years ago when you made them?
Mick: Oh boy, that's a toughy.
Wayne: Well, when we wrote the new album, we went back to Manchester and it was a great vibe.

You actually stayed in Manchester?
Wayne: Yeah. We knew we wanted to do an album, and decided that the best way of doing it songwriting-wise was to go back to where we came from growing up. We just absorbed everything that we could possibly see, which was great.
Mick: We got there a month before and rented a house and just hung out where we used to hang out.

But how many of those places were still around?
Mick: Barely any. Wayne probably lived five miles from where I lived, and we drove and sat outside his old house and looked up at the box room where we sat and wrote songs in, and we went to my old house and reminisced. So what would kids hear today? More scratches on the vinyl. You know what, I think they'd hear a freshness there still.
Wayne: I hope so.
Mick: Which is very relevant today.

How many of those songs did you write in that box room?
Wayne: A hell of a lot of the early stuff. I think that the whole of *Dog Style* was written at Mick's and my place. All of it.
Mick: I remember writing "Bitch" and "Runaway," the really early stuff.
Wayne: The "Bitch" was called "Heather Slits Her Wrists." I knew this bitch at the time called Heather, right, and she kicked me up the ass, and I was pissed off about that, so it went from "Heather Slit Her Wrists" to "Bitch," which I thought was a better title.

When Decca dropped you, supposedly due to a lack of record sales…(I'm quoting Mark Brennan here).
Wayne: Bollocks.
Mick: They wanted us to continue. You know, what really happened in all honesty and truth? We had a lot happen very quickly, there was a lot of struggling, and we were in the mix quickly with a major label and touring and all that, and we were very young and naive still, you have to understand that. It was really our own doing because it was due to fracturing, egos and internal squabbling. Everything that happens with bands happened then. Decca actually wanted us to carry on, they actually pleaded with us. There were several meetings about like, we want you to continue, and we just didn't see the woods for the trees, man, which was a mistake for us, but it's our own doing. Would you agree with that Wayne?
Wayne: Definitely. You have to understand as well that we hit the charts with the last one, which got in at 98 or something. The record sales were going good, we were selling, we weren't selling millions, but that information you have is absolutely false.

What happened in the early 1980s after all the line-up changes and changing the name to Slaughter that made the band quit for such a long time? Why wasn't there a new record for such a long time?
Wayne: Because I don't think we were ready for it. Mick was living in London, then he went to L.A., I was living in France. We saw each other, but it wasn't like, let's make an album, it was like, hey, what's up.
Mick: It was really like self-imposed exile.

L.A.?
Mick: And Lyon, France. The thing with Slaughter is that we did not slog it, and slog it, and slog it, it was just an unspoken thing with Wayne and I that it was time to put it on ice for a little bit. He was doing various projects in France, and I was doing something, but we were always in contact, and things finally felt right to come back and do this.

So what was it like to play the re-union show in 1996?
Mick: It was fantastic.

Were there people in the crowd who had seen the band years earlier?
Wayne: Oh yeah, there were guys there with dog head tattoos. I remember some guy who was like fifty-eight and he had Slaughter and the Dogs on his lip. At the front of the stage, I got my lyrics up there, because sometimes I forget my lyrics now and again, but I just watched the guys at the front because they knew all the words.
Mick: It was such a diverse crowd. There were kids who were fifteen going to up to fifty. And we headlined the first night and it sold out like a month or two in advance. It was at the Elizabeth Hall in Blackpool, which seats like 5,000 people. It was great. Young and old, there was student types there, punk rockers, regular joes.

What is it about Oasis that you find so appealing?
Mick: I think Noel Gallagher is a brilliant songwriting, his melodies are outstanding, and with his attitude, he's great.

And Manchester is stamped on the band?
Mick: Absolutely. 100 percent pure Manchester.

The attitude?
Mick: It's the whole package.

But what about Happy Mondays?
Wayne: Happy Mondays are okay if you like that kind of style. What I like about Oasis is that they are down to earth, lyric-wise and music-wise. There's no, let's throw rhythm boxes in, or let's do this, do that.
Mick: It's more honest. And again, that's what we were saying earlier. It's the Manchester soul, it's raw and honest. You get a street education, you become raw from being on the streets, and honesty does reflect in your music. That's what we ascribe to, and that's why we like Oasis. It's just good. They're just

good old Manchester boys.

Do you guys listen to the records of your peers, like Chelsea or the UK Subs?

Mick: No.

Wayne: No.

Just because it doesn't appeal to you anymore, or you could not care less?

Wayne: Well, I listen to the Rich Kids. I listen to old New York Dolls, Iggy Pop, and the old stuff of the Clash.

Mick: It's really personal preference you know. No disrespect to those guys, I'm sure what they are putting out is great and all that, but at the end of the day, it's just personal choice. So, no, I don't listen to it.

When a kid goes to the record stores to the punk bin, the Chelsea record will be right next to the Slaughter and the Dogs record.

Wayne: We never said we never wanted it to be that way. It's like, punk is an attitude, so if we are in the record store and we are in that record section, I don't give a shit, as long as it's in the record store. It's just important that the kids can see it and listen to our music. If it's reggae, rock or whatever, I don't care.

Now that the record is out and has had a good reception from a lot of people.

Mick: It's gotten a fucking great reception.

Can we expect another record, and if so, will you go back to Manchester to make it?

Mick: We could make it in LA, absolutely.

Wayne: But why change good chemistry?

Mick: We would like to go back and copy what we did in terms of...Well, copy the routine of renting a house and really soaking it in.

Wayne: We could see family there as well. You can see family, go out and have a drink.

Mick: Go out and see a good fight.

Wayne: It's good you know. You just absorb everything. The day after you get the guitar, bass, and drums, and off you go.

I asked this same question when I spoke to Captain Sensible. The first wave of punk happened under a labor government in the 1970s, then all of a sudden under Tony Blair's Labor government, the whole old school, like the Vibrators and Damned, pop back up. Is it about returning politics to the street? Am I thinking about this too much?

Wayne: You think too deep.

Mick: Let's get Tony Blair and see what he says.

Okay, okay. But now that you have toured America, for the first time, could the next record really be as Manchester-centric?

Mick: We could record it in fucking Barbados really. It's always gonna be who we are because that's where we are from. So, yeah, it's going to reflect where we come from no matter whatever we do.

Wayne, why would a rock'n'roller spend so much time in France? I can't think of one French rock'n'roll band.

Wayne: Have you ever shagged a French woman? Then you'll know!

Mick: I'd play him songs over the phone. I'd say, I got a new one, do ya want to give it a listen, and he'd say, okay, okay, I got it.

Wayne: Because I was getting my dick sucked as I was listening to it.

Mick: You can call him on that. I'd be like, what are ya doing, and he'd say, getting a blow-job.

Are we going to see any re-issues of the old material?

Wayne: Well, we don't know. We don't have any control over that.

You haven't tried to buy the rights back?

Wayne: Do you want the truth? I don't think we really give a shit now. We have been exploited that much.

Well, there have been unlicensed re-issues.

Mick: You know what, it has been re-gurgitated and re-gurgitated and fucking re-gurgitated, and we're at the point where it's like, okay, it's time to move on.

You would rather rest your laurels on this record than worry about the past?

Wayne: Our eyes are on the future and not on the past.

Is your distance from politics a political statement itself?

Wayne: Of course it is. It's a good question, and the answer to that I think is, yes, it is. There is politics behind that reaction. I don't believe that a songwriter who does not have a good education, politically-speaking, has the right to go out and say things, because the kids who are 13 and 14 who buy the records are very easily wavered and do silly things. You have to be a little bit responsible in terms of what you write.

Do you agree?

Mick: Yeah, I do. But it depends on who you are, it really does. Your values, your upbringing, it depends on a lot of factors. It's all I can speak for, which is that we write songs that reflect what we see and what we feel.

It was once said that band played music as a way of staying out of trouble, but it seems to me that playing street punk at dirty little bars almost invites trouble.

Wayne: That's all we had to play. It was like here you go guys, here's a list of three venues. You can play this one where there is black ties and ball gowns, or this one, where there is a Tom Jones impersonator, and then you guys are on...

Wayne: My mum , when I told her I was going to be a musician, she thought I was going to be a Tony Bennet or something. She thought I would travel the world. She was proud and everything.

Mick: Or there was this one. It's down and dirty, and can be a bit violent, but it's just where the kids are going. Let me ask you, what one would you play?

The rock'n'roll bar.

Mick: Exactly. Did we start out there, yes we did.

Everybody from Dr. Feelgood to Eddie and the Hot Rods played working men's clubs four or five times a week.

Wayne: We played working men's clubs.

Did you play a lot of covers?

Wayne: Sure, we did. We did "Jean Genie," all sorts of stuff, but we did our set as well. We were always sliding it in there.

Mick: Doing the covers was really the way I learned to play.

It was your music school?

Mick: Sure, it was doing the covers you know. When I actually sat down and mastered a Mick Ronson (David Bowie) riff, I thought, wow, this is fucking brilliant. it was definitely my school when I was younger.

So when Mick joined you in the studio for the 7" for the first time, what was that like?

Wayne: It was like, we have reached it.

Mick: You see, there's a great thing in naivete, because you just don't know. So asking Nick to come and play on the record was just being young and naive. You know, just to have him come down and play it was a dream come true. But because I was young, I was more of a giggly kid than being catatonic in the bathroom. It was wonderful, and I love him dearly.

Do you think a lot of people don't quite understand the relationship between Mick Ronson's era and punk? Syd Barrett was supposed to produce the Damned's second record, and they toured with Tommy Bolan.

Mick: I would say that there's some truth in that. There's a lot of people that wouldn't admit to that early on. At one time, it changed, and all those great bands became old farts in text, in interviews and that. But if you're really honest, and we were really honest, you embrace that. If it wasn't for Mick Ronson, I wouldn't be playing guitar. If it wasn't for looking at David Bowie doing "Star Man" on Top of the Pops, Wayne and I wouldn't be in a band together, so I do think that kids don't get it fully today. There's a wealth of music to be found in the old school that still stands up today, at least in my opinion. And you can learn from that.

Is one thing that makes you feel good is that you can put your record alongside Bowie's Diamond Dogs and it stands up.

Mick: Yes, absolutely. It's a real honor, and a thrill.



Brady Baltezore / BLACK CAT MUSIC

Last few weeks before tour, sleeping between the van and a few different beds and couches. Last place I stayed before we left was with these graffiti kids in the mission in SF. I stayed with these kids for about two weeks, went writing with them a few times, had a few merry times, all that. I guess I got tangled up with one of them. Overall it was an eye-opening experience, for sure. Although I have done a little graffiti before, it was usually stencils, strictly lo-profile solo shots, born of boredom or of whim. These two weeks were different. I was afforded a new view of complete immersion. It's an almost zen lifestyle for these kids, as the writing is its own end. There's no question of what's going on a given night. Nine of ten nights is paint. That's it. I can't read most of the shit, I didn't learn that much about it. I guess Jane or Joe Average couldn't read most of the pieces, either (maybe the bigger pieces, but the smaller tags may as well be Arabic street signs in whitest Iowa). Once I had read a few things, though, more of it became clear. These kids, meanwhile, are historians, detectives, they know it up and down, an intricate unspoken language.

19, 24, 25 years old. 30. You bat ambition around a bit, love, lose, love again. You find something you like, maybe you make something beautiful. Maybe you have the talent to send your dreams out into the world, sing them, paint them. Maybe you don't want what anything you see around you, and instead work to create a world for yourself. It occurred to me that the very notion of disaffected young people living without regards for future culture or the concerns of the society at large has seemed less and less a looming societal ill. It's more of a marketing strategy these days. ("don't listen to them, kid, you're fresh, cynical, directionless, fucking hip hop - drink some Sprite!") With these graf kids it feels different somehow. Its 'no future' but with a beat you could dance to, tapping into a larger rhythm, vibrating with some undescribable raw poetry. It's not a macho masculine anger response, for the most part, breaking-the-law, breaking-all-the-rules rebel bullshit, no. It's something more along the line of I-know-the-rules-but-I'm-not-playing-at-all.

Part of the beauty of the thing, maybe part of the reason that graffiti is such a volatile item to some, and the reason that it is so reviled by those who own walls, who themselves are confounded, confused, infuriated (I always picture the city gov. paint squad foreman in some smoky bunker, deep below city hall, pacing before his crack team of graffiti removal technicians, pounding his fist like Mussolini and ranting about shades of grey paint) is that there are some talented motherfuckers writing on walls. Many of the pieces I've seen in NYC and San Francisco alone would blow a square gallery-chasing fine artist's hand skills away, flat out. The thing's up for what - a week? Two years? Two hours? It strikes me that it may be hard for many to relate to what would seem to to be an aimless and pointless passion. It is akin to the consideration of masturbation as a mortal christian sin (onan) the spilling of seed, wasted potential. Sure, some of them work art jobs. Quite a few designers have connection to graffiti in one way or another. The arts are related, but keep a careful, animal distance from one another. On another level, though, I got the impression that the people who did the big, sanctioned graffiti pieces are somewhat disrespected, like if they're getting paid, then fuck them. I don't know much about that, though. I'm an outsider to that whole system, and I'll stay that way, thanks. I do know that the crazier the spot, the better, and I've now seen some shit on sides of buildings you'd need some special alpine gear to do. And a drink.

I had the same feeling (learning more about graf) as I did the first time I heard heavy music, really heavy music, like early Carcass records. At first everything sounds the same, like a level of white noise. Eventually the intricacy reveals itself, like a radio whining as it struggles for solid frequencies, the poetic details of the thing peering out as little glowing red eyes in the dark woods. It was interesting to have the feeling again like that, like punk rock, because feelings like that do go away sometimes. When the world blurs focus, black and white giving way to reveal shades of grey, it's harder to feel as though you are exited just to be standing where you are. It seems that many people spend their adult years lamenting squandered youthhood, chasing the feeling they had when they were pubescent. There's a connection that's made between (surging hormones+lack of life-experience, wisdom) and the soundtrack that happens to coincide. It's the reason most people think music simply died whatever year they turned about twenty-five or so. "They don't make 'em like they used to." I've been learning that I function best surrounded by unfamiliar phenomena, seeing or hearing new things, and I try to be open to them when they appear. Otherwise, life can become a chase of good old days, a chase of (not the first time you kissed or had sex but the first time you got off with someone else and that first time you were so in love that you fell into someone's eyes). It's true, though, those records, they sound...thinner these days.



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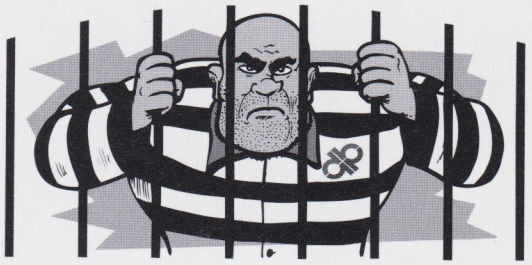


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